10¢

A "Madame Storey" Novelette by Footner

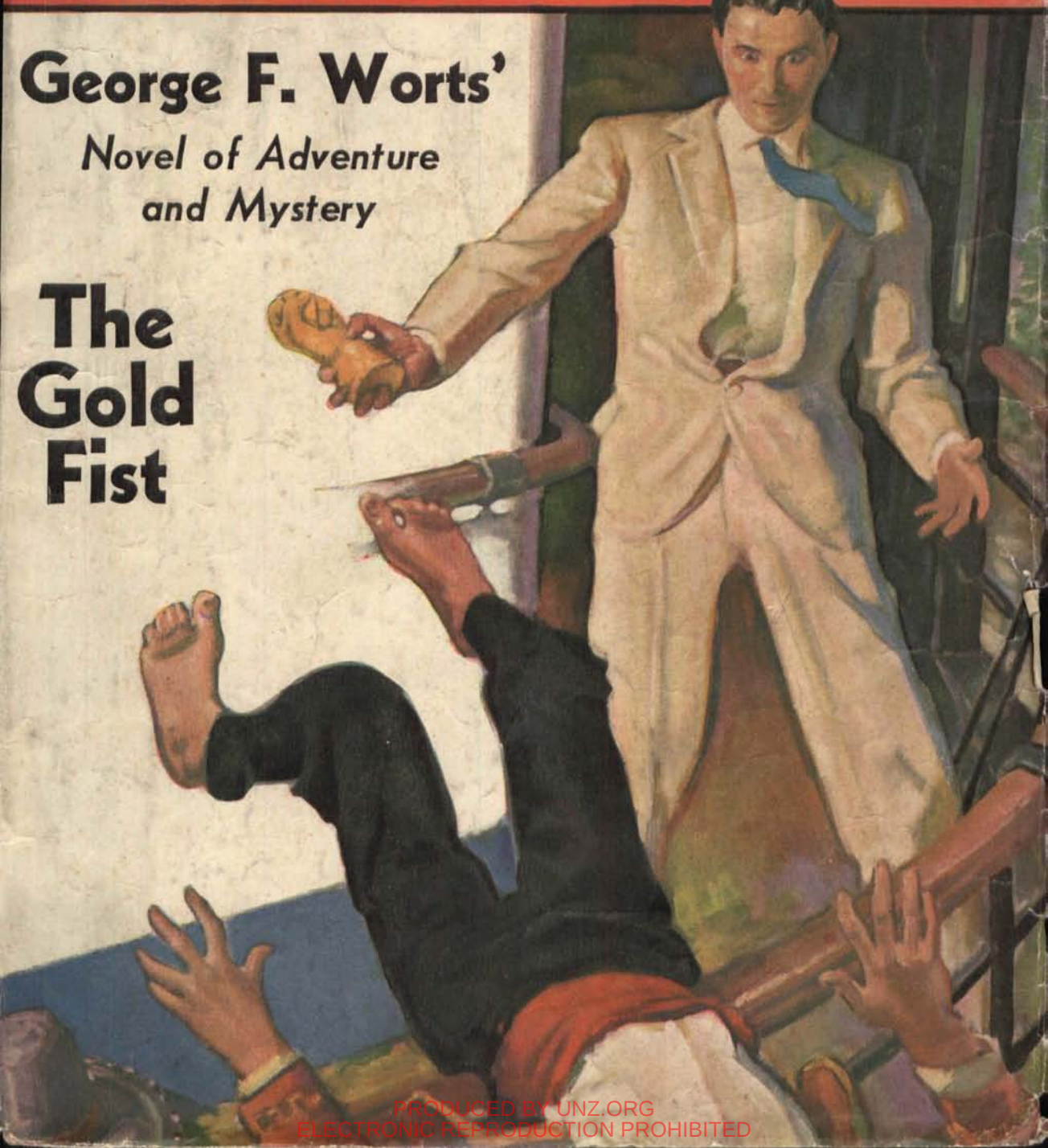
ARGOSY

AUG. 31 WEEKLY

George F. Worts'

Novel of Adventure and Mystery

The Gold Fist



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The one thing they didn't teach him

THEY taught him everything about business except the thing he most needed to know—*how to avoid offending business men with whom he came in contact.*

Are they "not in" to you?

The No. 1 handicap in business is halitosis (bad breath). It hurts you with your associates, your employer, and the people you have to meet in the course of your work.

The insidious thing about halitosis is that you yourself never know when you have it—and anyone, yourself included, is likely to be a victim. Ninety per cent of cases, says a noted dental authority, are due to the fermentation of tiny food particles that even careful tooth brushing has failed to remove.

Don't guess about your breath. You can make sure that it is beyond reproach by simply using Listerine. Listerine halts fermentation, a major cause of odors, then gets rid of the odors themselves. The entire mouth becomes sweet, clean, fresh, and wholesome.

Get in the habit of rinsing the mouth with Listerine systematically, every morning and every night, and between times before appointments. Keep a bottle handy in home and office. Tuck it into your bag when you travel. It is a business and social asset. Lambert Pharmacal Company, St. Louis, Missouri.

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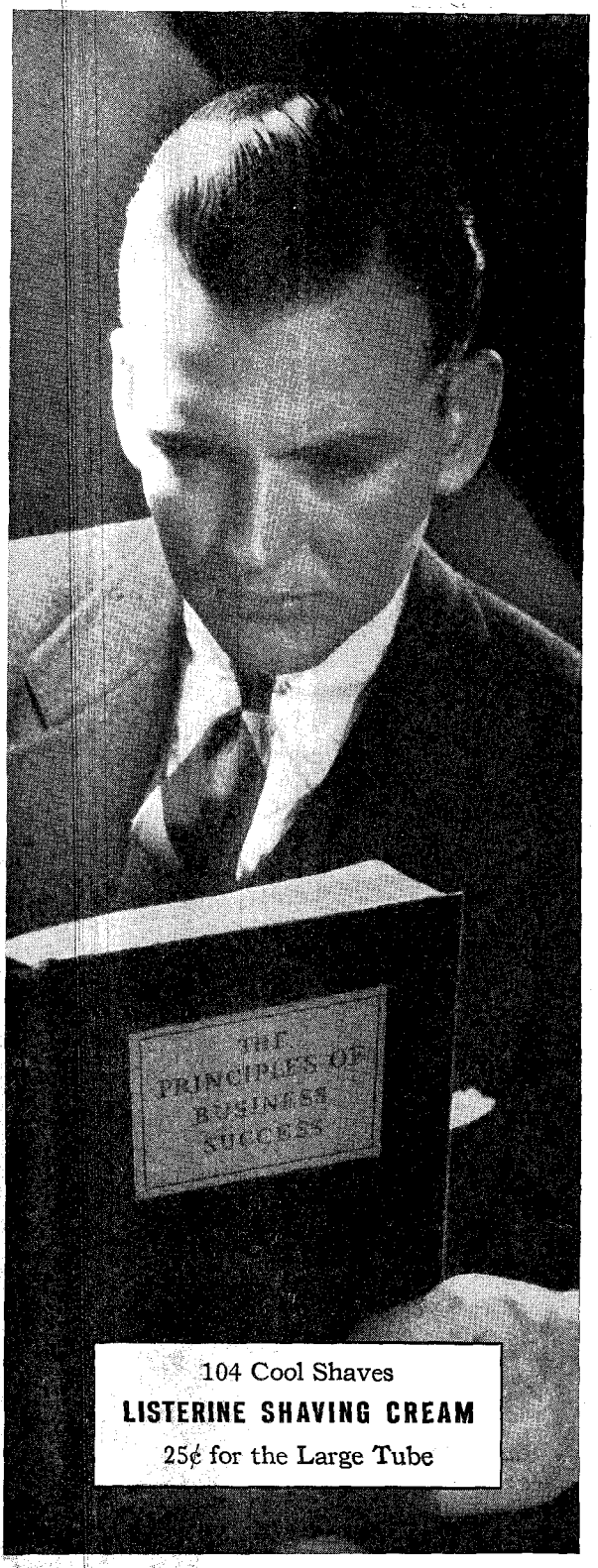

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ARGOSY

Action Stories of Every Variety

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Bill Lassiter was shocked breathless

The Gold Fist

By GEORGE F. WORTS

Author of "Shark Bait," "Broken Circuit," etc.

CHAPTER I.

THE BET.

"LET'S see you do it," the blond girl taunted. "Let's see you try to do it. I can't think of anything funnier."

"Bill," the lawyer shouted, "this girl is simply trying to goad you into an utterly imbecilic proposition. I won't let you do it!"

Bill Lassiter looked at the blond girl, then he looked at the lawyer. Then he lit a cigarette. He took the cigarette from a platinum case and lit it with a platinum lighter. The cigarette was a brand made especially to his order in Constantinople. Each was identified by a gold dot near the tip. Each cost eleven cents.

Bill Lassiter screwed up his eyes and gazed at the blond girl through the fog of costly aromatic smoke. He was a young man, no more than twenty-seven, whose every pose and gesture bespoke long familiarity with the better things of life.

He said: "How much did it cost me to have the Skiparee overhauled?" The Skiparee was his Diesel yacht. "Wasn't it about fifty thousand?"

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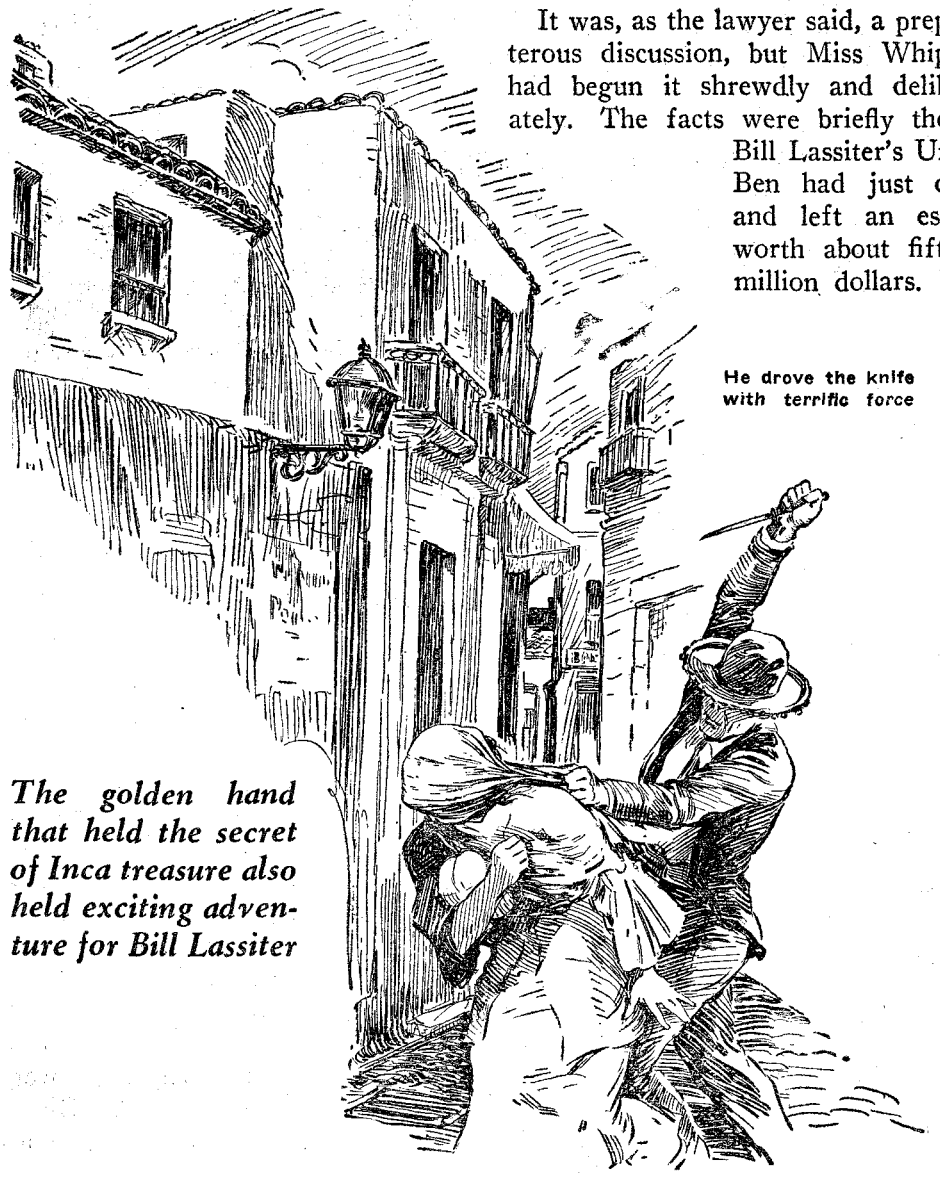
"No," Mr. McClurg replied. "It was a hundred and twenty-five thousand."

Bill Lassiter made a gesture in flicking the ash from his cigarette, a gesture that betrayed a slight impatience with a man who would haggle over a paltry seventy-five thousand dollars.

"This whole discussion is preposterous!" the lawyer shouted.

"No," the blond girl said smoothly. "I'm merely betting two million dollars that he hasn't got it in him; that he isn't capable of going out and making fifty thousand dollars in one year with his own efforts, without anybody's help, and without using his own name."

It was, as the lawyer said, a preposterous discussion, but Miss Whipple had begun it shrewdly and deliberately. The facts were briefly these: Bill Lassiter's Uncle Ben had just died and left an estate worth about fifteen million dollars. Un-



He drove the knife with terrific force

The golden hand that held the secret of Inca treasure also held exciting adventure for Bill Lassiter

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der the terms of his will, thirteen million of this went to Bill; two million to his smart young secretary, Miss Ladorna Whipple. Miss Whipple had been Uncle Ben's secretary for less than two years. It could correctly be assumed that she was a fast little worker.

An ambitious and clever young lady, she knew how sensitive Bill Lassiter was to taunts. And she knew what a fool he was about chivalry. She'd heard stories, and she'd seen Bill in action. He'd cut off his leg if a woman wanted it badly enough.

So, while her proposition was preposterous, it wasn't when you considered Bill Lassiter's temperament and background. He had distinguished himself by playing a fine game of polo, collecting Indian arrowheads, and traveling extensively about the world. He had never earned a penny in his life. And Ladorna Whipple wanted to bet Bill two million against his thirteen million that he couldn't earn fifty thousand dollars honestly in one year.

Bill said thoughtfully, "Fifty thousand dollars doesn't seem like much money. I think I could do it."

"Bill," the lawyer said, "you're a softie, and you're a born sucker. You don't know anything about money!"

Bill answered, "I pay fifty thousand rent for my penthouse. I've spent that much for a horse. I'll just take that bet, Ladorna."

Miss Whipple's beautiful blue eyes gleamed, and Mike McClurg rose from his desk chair like a skyrocket. He upset an inkwell. He pounded on the desk. He roared:

"Suppose you lose? How about your uncle's philanthropies? How about the Happy Hundred? How about the scholarships and the agricultural farm? You know, of course, that he made no provisions for any of them in his will—that you're expected to carry them on!"

"Of course, of course," Bill said amiably. "Draw up the paper, Mike, and I will sign it."

The lawyer shouted, "I won't be a party to such a criminal procedure!"

"Then we'll go elsewhere."

"Wait! All right. I'll draw it up. But—but—"

But he drew it up, perhaps the most fantastic document to which a man and a girl ever set their signatures. By the terms of this incredible agreement, William J. Lassiter was wagering his entire share in the estate of Benjamin B. Lassiter, against the entire share of Miss Ladorna Whipple, that he could go forth and before midnight, one year from date, earn, amass, accrue or in any honest way assemble the sum of $50,000, Michael D. McClurg to act as judge and referee. Bill's income was to be cut off, although he would have the use of his penthouse, his stable of polo ponies, and his automobiles. He was to retain all his clothing and personal effects. But he was not to borrow money.

The two parties thereto signed the agreement in the presence of each other and in the presence of a notary public, who affixed his seal.

Always courteous, Bill held open the door for Miss Whipple to depart. And she went out of the office with the air of a girl who sees no logical reason why she should not be the owner of a fifteen million dollar estate at midnight one year from date.

"NOW, Bill," said the lawyer, when the door was closed, "sit down and listen to me. I want to tell you what some of the conse-

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quences will be if you lose that bet. Have you ever heard of the Happy Hundred?"

"Of course."

"But you don't know what a wonderful thing it is. You don't, but you're going to, Bill. Grab your hat. I'm going to show you the Happy Hundred."

"But I've seen it."

"I want you to see it again in light of the fact that you have gambled those kids' chances in your insane wager. Come on."

For the first time since he had rollickingly taken Ladorna Whipple's wager, Bill felt uncomfortable.

"Look here," he said, "Uncle Ben should have provided for the Happy Hundred in his will."

"But he didn't. I told you that."

Bill didn't want to go, but he went. They drove out to Washington Heights in Bill's town car, and stopped before the neat brick building with its flower gardens and playgrounds. The Happy Hundred had been Uncle Ben's idea—he gave one hundred orphans, of all ages from a few months to eighteen years, as much fun as possible while they grew up, instead of the usual dreary, awful life in the usual orphan asylum.

Children were playing in the grounds when Bill's car stopped at the curb. They stopped playing when he and Mike McClurg appeared. They came yelling and whooping.

The air was deafening for a while with glad shouts of "Here's Uncle Bill! Uncle Bill's here!"

Bill might not have minded it so much if there hadn't been one small person in a pink frock, who had brown eyes and wild curls. She grabbed his hand with both of hers and laughed up at him and jumped up and down in an abandon of good feeling that simply got him. She was about five years old, and she was the kind of daughter that any man, even a hard-case bachelor like Bill, would have been delighted to claim.

The Happy Hundred were suddenly reduced to a brown-eyed girl in a rumpled pink frock, whose eyes shimmered with unquenchable good fellowship.

There were plenty more. Bill had rather hoped they wouldn't be such a nice bunch of kids. He suspected that the old girl in the funny raccoon coat was responsible. She was the kind of old lady that every child wishes were his grandmother.

This was Mrs. Dearwester, the matron. She was a small, gray-haired person. It was the collegiate style of raccoon coat, and it looked as if it might have been broken in by a great many undergraduates before it passed into her possession.

She must have been well over seventy, but her eyes were bright and keen, and her smile was not much older than Bill's. He did not remember her, but she remembered him.

"You see," she explained above the uproar, "you're the only relative they have." And she added that he had been unanimously elected the favorite hero of the whole mob of them—because he had done such dashing things!

The name of the young lady in pink was Maggie. When she galloped off and brought back an amazing-looking handmade wash cloth, which she had made herself, with his name embroidered in one corner of it, he felt pretty uncomfortable.

He kissed Maggie on both cheeks. He got into the town car, and, as it drove off, he said to Mike McClurg: "Stop looking at me as if I were a

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murderer. They have nothing to worry about. I'm going to win that bet!"

CHAPTER II.

JOANNA.

ON a tropical evening eleven months and one week later, Bill Lassiter was walking down a narrow street in Lima, Peru, with his fists clenched in his pockets. He was much leaner than he had been a year ago, and he was copper-plated by the blast of the Peruvian sun.

As he walked along the street, his mind grappled with certain painful facts and figures. Long ago, he had figured out with pencil and paper just how much fifteen million dollars is in terms of months, weeks, days and hours.

It was really staggering. It was $1,712 an hour, $41,095 a day, $288,462 a week, and $1,250,000 a month, not including the interest. No matter what he did or where he was, or whether he was asleep or awake, that much money had been flitting out of his life since eleven months and one week ago.

A year had seemed like such a long, long time! And fifty thousand dollars had seemed like such an unimportant sum of money. He did not feel bitter about it, but he did feel terribly discouraged. In eleven months and one week, he had earned, amassed, or accumulated in one honest way or another the sum total of exactly $00.00

He had played fair. He had not borrowed. He had not used influence. He had not used his own name. In Peru, he was known as Howard Blangdon.

The only way he could possibly hang on to that fifteen million was to marry Ladorna Whipple. And not only would he not marry her, if she were the last woman on earth, but the chances were that she would laugh hysterically if he suggested it.

Bill Lassiter had tried his utmost. Everything had failed. He had finally gone to Peru on a promising proposition. It was an old silver mine, an idle property. What Bill had done, in brief, was to try to promote this mine. He had tried to raise one million dollars by his honest efforts. If he succeeded, he was to receive a $50,000 commission from the owner of the property.

It was a perfectly legitimate proposition, and by the very way he went about it, Bill had proved that he wasn't quite so dumb as Miss Ladorna Whipple had thought. He had interested the mine owner, a Peruvian, and he had interested a syndicate of South American capitalists. Furthermore, the deal had gone through. The only flaw in the whole procedure was that Bill hadn't collected his $50,000 commission. He had been outsmarted. Bill's lack of business experience was his ruin.

At the last moment, the syndicate had juggled matters in such a way that Bill was left out in the cold. And the mine owner was quick to seize his opportunity and refuse to pay Bill the commission he had honestly earned. Bill had done the only thing a man can do under such circumstances. He had punched the Peruvian mine owner in the nose.

He was licked. By losing his $50,000, he had lost a $15,000,000 fortune. His funds had dwindled; he had only enough left to pay his hotel bill and his passage home on a second rate steamer.

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He had heard from Mike McClurg several times since he had been in Peru, but all of these letters were abusive, and Bill had not read more than the opening paragraph or two. Bill did not mind the abuse nearly so much as he minded the memory of Maggie. In his darkest hours, Maggie haunted him. He had treasured the wash cloth she had made with her own chubby, dirty hands. Once in a while he took it out and looked at it.

He did not mind losing his fortune nearly so much as he minded what that loss would mean to Maggie. When he thought of Maggie, he felt sick.

HE was thinking of Maggie as he walked along that narrow, dark street in Lima. And suddenly she was jarred out of his mind by a woman's screams. They came from some distance down the street. And as Bill's heart leaped to the thrilling sound of them, they stopped as if they were cut off by a knife.

He ran in the direction from which they had seemed to come. Two figures were struggling under a great mahogany tree. In the light from a distant street lamp he saw that one was a young woman, the other a tall, thin man, a Peruvian.

Without hesitation, Bill Lassiter threw himself on the man, wrenched him free of the girl and, with two blows, knocked him unconscious.

The girl was softly weeping, almost fainting. Bill picked her up and dusted her off. She said breathlessly:

"Don't call the police. Please—Let's get away from here."

He took her arm. She was trembling. She did not even glance at the unconscious man on the ground.

A little mystified, Bill said, "Where can I take you?"

"Nowhere," she panted.

"But where do you live? Where are you stopping?"

"It—it doesn't make any difference. Can't we just go somewhere and sit down?"

"Of course." Bill took her to a small café not far from his hotel. There he bought her brandy and watched her intently and with the greatest solicitude while she repaired the damages to herself.

These damages were slight, and their repair consisted merely of applying powder to her nose and lipstick to her lips. While she was thus engaged, Bill Lassiter studied her and soon arrived at the conclusion that she was the loveliest person upon whom he had ever rested his eyes.

She was a slim, smallish, dark-eyed girl with beautiful dark hair and the longest lashes he had ever seen. Long lashes had always affected him strongly, and these were so long, so gracefully curved that merely to glance at them was to become a slave. The eyes they shaded were large and luminous and mysterious. There was something so mysterious, so romantic about this beautiful stranger that Bill, looking at her, became breathless.

A glance had told him that she was an American. And he suddenly found himself wanting to know all about her.

The brandy restored her composure, but it deepened her mystery. She was utterly unwilling to talk about herself. She was grateful for his timely arrival, but she preferred not to discuss that strange encounter under the mahogany tree.

"I just don't want to talk about it."

Bill Lassiter suspected that her struggle with the tall, thin Peruvian had been the result of an encounter that was not a surprise to her. He

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knew that it had not been a romantic encounter, because the Peruvian had been decidedly of the lower class—the kind of which Bill had seen so many in Lima—unemployed young men who begged or stole.

"What's your name?" Bill asked.

And she answered, in a voice the music of which would haunt him for a long time: "Just think of me as Joanna."

"Joanna what?"

Her smile was mysterious. "Just Joanna."

At the look in his face, she bent across the little café table and patted the back of his hand—a friendly little pat. And she said, "Now, look here. You've done me a great favor, but I can't tell you my name and I can't see you again. And I can't go into the reasons. We'll never see each other again, so what does it matter?"

It mattered tremendously to Bill. Her mystery maddened him. The thought that she might go permanently out of his life maddened him still more. He pleaded with her. She would tell him nothing. She did, however, compromise.

"If you'll promise not to follow me, I'll promise to meet you here at this same time tomorrow night."

There was nothing for Bill to do but accept those terms. He was afraid she was playing with him, that she hadn't the slightest intention of coming to the little café tomorrow night.

BUT she did come, a few minutes late. And she was even lovelier than Bill had imagined in the course of twenty-four hours. And she was as romantic and mysterious as ever.

That meeting was even less satisfactory than Bill had feared it might be. She sweetly and gently refused to tell him her last name.

"But I love you," he protested. "I've got to know who you are and where you live."

"I can't tell you."

"New York or Chicago or San Francisco?"

"Yes!" she laughed.

Joanna remained romantic and mysterious and infinitely desirable, and when she left that night it was with the promise to see him again at the same place, same hour—nine-thirty—the following night. Yet Bill had the feeling that he would never see her again.

NEXT day dawned oppressively hot, with a threat of thunder in the air. As usual, at noon, the shops were closed; the streets emptied and the life of the Peruvian city quieted and became slumberous for the siesta hour. Bill was on his veranda, feeling blue, looking out across the glaring white streets and the red-tile rooftops toward the foothills of the Andes when he saw a stout Chinese woman waddling along the street.

She was evidently in a great hurry. As she waddled along the sidewalk, she clutched something in both hands to her breast.

She passed an alleyway, and as she did so a man sprang out. He moved with amazing speed. He was a tall, thin man; obviously a Peruvian. He wore a red silk or satin jacket, tight-fitting black trousers, a large black sombrero with small silver balls dangling from the brim, and he carried a many-colored *serape* in one hand.

He used the *serape* as Bill had never seen a *serape* used before. He tossed it in a loop over the face of the hurrying Chinese woman and brought her

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to a swift stop. This he did with one hand in one dexterous movement.

Halting and silencing her thus, he drove a long, thin knife with terrific force into her back on the left side.

With never a sound, the Chinese woman settled in her tracks. It was so swift, so expert, so brutal, that Bill Lassiter was shocked breathless. He had never seen a human move with such speed and precision. It had been like the pouncing of a great spider.

The murderer glanced swiftly up and down the street, then snatched from the hands of the dead woman the small paper package she had clutched to her breast. As he straightened up, he was ripping away the paper.

Something popped out of his hand. To Bill's staring eyes, it resembled a golden egg. It was about the size of a man's fist, and it was undoubtedly of gold. Before the killer could snatch it up again, the sun struck soft yellow gleams and glints from it and verified Bill Lassiter's guess.

It lay in the dust of the street but an instant, then the murderer snatched it up and ran into the alley from whence he had come, but not before the American on the balcony had sounded an alarm.

Bill yelled, "Police! Murder!"

And the man, fleeing, glanced up at the balcony. For a moment, pig-like eyes stared at the American. Bill saw his face clearly and sharply, and was shocked anew. For the killer had no nose. Evidently his nose had been cleanly removed with the single slash of a knife. Where it had been was old scar tissue, well healed, and two holes, high up, where the nostrils were.

At great personal risk, Bill swung over the balcony rail, slid bear-fashion down a column and raced after the killer. By the time he had reached the alley a policeman was loping down the street. The murderer had vanished.

Bill told what he had seen to the policeman. Then he set about looking for the wrapping of the package which the killer had torn from the gold object. Gusts of wind were whirling scraps of paper and leaves about. He gave up the search and went to headquarters, where he was questioned at length. He gave to the police a very vivid description of the killer. Later he ascertained that the fellow had not yet been caught, and that the Chinese woman had not been identified or claimed.

CHAPTER III.

THE CITY OF PARA.

AT half-past nine that night he went to the little café to keep his appointment with Joanna. The proprietor gave him a note which, he said, the *señorita* had delivered that morning.

> I am leaving Lima at once. Please don't think I'm letting you down without good reason. I am engaged in a most difficult undertaking, and my life is in such danger that I don't dare take needless risks. I will not subject you to these risks. Forget me.
>
> JOANNA.

The first large, hot drops of the rain that had been threatening all day began to fall as Bill left the café. The rumbling of thunder and the occasional flickerings of lightning were in keeping with his mood. He felt stormy and depressed.

He returned to his hotel, packed his suitcase and paid his bill. Inasmuch as Joanna had left Lima that morning, with no promise of returning, Bill had no desire to linger in Peru. He had

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lost his bet with Ladorna Whipple. There was nothing for him to do but return to New York. He had learned that a small steamer, the City of Para, with accommodations for a few passengers, had come into port that morning from Santiago and would clear shortly before midnight for New York via the canal. When the City of Para sailed, he would be aboard.

Bill sent his suitcase to the little landing stage from which a company launch would take it out to the steamer, anchored a few hundred yards offshore, then strolled through the rain to the Metropole Café, on the Plaza. He wanted a drink very badly. He went into the café and sat down at a small table beside a palm.

Ordering a whisky and soda, he gave himself over to gloomy reflection. He had lost his fortune, and he had lost the one girl for whom he had ever had any real regard. He had known hundreds of beautiful girls in America and Europe. Many of them had gone out of their way to be attractive, the gold-diggers of all classes. At twenty-seven, Bill had thought himself immune. Until he had met Joanna, he had never met a girl who appealed to him completely.

His drink came. He drank it in gulps. As he was finishing it, he heard a man's voice beyond the palm say:

"Oh, it's life-size. It's pure gold and just about the size of a normal man's fist, and I'd give a hundred thousand dollars for it."

Another man said: "I've heard about it. I've heard legends about it—the kind of legends you doubtless used to hear about the Koh-i-noor."

"Have you ever seen it?" the first man asked.

"Never. But I'd like to. I could use that hundred thousand."

Bill now heard the scraping of chairs, and saw the two men emerge from behind the palm. One was tall and thin and white-haired. He wore a pongee suit of excellent cut and a white Panama hat. The other man was black-haired and shorter.

Bill paid for his drink and followed them. He would not have said that he was a drowning man snatching at a straw, but that was why he followed the tall, white-haired man. The two men parted. The younger buttoned his slicker and walked away. The elder ran through the rain to the Hotel de Lima, just a few doors further along the Plaza.

Bill followed him. He saw the older man look about the lobby, then go into the bar. Bill went to the desk, where a clerk told him that the tall, white-haired man was John B. Grayson.

"Of Grayson and Clark?" Bill asked.

"Yes."

Bill knew about Grayson and Clark. He had guessed that the tall, rather soldierly, white-haired man was some one of consequence, but he had not suspected how important. Grayson and Clark was a famous firm of construction engineers, with branches in all parts of the world. They built tunnels and bridges; they exploited mining and oil fields. They maintained one of the largest organizations of its kind in the world.

GRAYSON was having a nightcap at the bar when Bill walked in and introduced himself. He introduced himself as Howard Blangdon.

"I beg your pardon, Mr. Grayson, but I overheard you talking in the Metropole—about a golden fist."

The president of Grayson and Clark

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was looking at Bill with the bluest and shrewdest eyes he had ever seen. They were calm and measuring eyes, and they were more than a little suspicious.

"Have you got it?" Mr. Grayson asked.

"No. But I saw it. This noon."

"Here, in Lima?"

"Yes. I saw—" And Bill described the murder and theft he had seen from the balcony outside his hotel room.

John B. Grayson listened attentively, and said nothing until Bill had finished. Then he asked, dryly, "What are you proposing to do, Mr. Blangdon—get it from the murderer?"

"There's nothing like trying," Bill admitted. "Can you tell me why it's worth so much? After all, a lump of solid gold the size of a man's fist can't be worth more than a few hundred dollars."

"I don't know why it's worth so much," Mr. Grayson replied. "Saying it's worth a hundred thousand is like a sick man saying he'd give a million dollars if he was well. What I mean is, the sick man would give an exorbitant amount of money to be well, if he were desperately sick. All I can tell you about the gold fist, Mr. Blangdon, is what my head field man told me in a brief note before he was killed."

Mr. Grayson paused and sipped his whisky sour without taking his eyes from Bill's for a moment.

"Perhaps I should explain that my head field man, Jake Green, was a man on whose word I have relied for years. After my geologists or engineers got through appraising a job, it was Jake Green who decided. I took his decisions on jobs ranging as high as fifty million dollars. In other words, he was a man who, in all the years I knew him, never made a mistake, a man I could and did trust implicitly.

"Jake Green said, in his note, that he had investigated a piece of old Incan goldsmith work, a gold fist, which somehow held the key to an engineering secret so remarkable, so valuable that he put its worth at unguessed millions. Without knowing anything more than that about this gold fist, I would back up Jake Green's say-so to the tune of a hundred thousand."

"You say he was killed?"

"He was murdered — stabbed in Cerro de Pasco shortly after he had written me that note."

"Do you think he was killed because of the gold fist?"

"It's very likely."

"Did he know what this scientific or engineering secret was?"

"He may have, Mr. Blangdon. If he did, the secret died with him. In his note, he said merely that this scientific or engineering principle the key to which is, so to speak, grasped so firmly by the gold fist, was thousands of years old—a principle used by the Incas at the height of their glory, and lost when their grandeur was lost. As the Incas were the most highly developed race ever to inhabit this hemisphere, and wonderful engineers, there's no question that they may have left priceless secrets behind. Yes, I would give you or any one else a hundred thousand dollars for that fist, provided the secret went along with it."

"Where," Bill asked, "shall I deliver it?"

The president of Grayson and Clark laughed. "I'm flying to New York on tomorrow's plane. I shall be there indefinitely."

"Thank you," Bill said briskly. "I'll deliver it to you in New York."

As he started to go Grayson laughed softly. "Bill, I hope you win that bet!"

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Bill stopped short and looked at him. He was suddenly angry because Mike McClurg or Ladorna Whipple, or both, had let that bet become public.

"I recognized you when you spoke to me," Grayson explained. "I've seen you play polo. I really wonder if William J. Lassiter is tough enough to romp into this."

"Howard Blangdon has learned to be tough, Mr. Grayson."

The clear eyes studied him for a moment. "I think you ought to be warned, Bill. Did you know there's a band of really ruthless super-criminals operating south of Panama? I have a faint idea they may be interested in this gold fist. Be careful."

Bill thanked him and went out into the rain. It would be a heavy storm, as these thunderstorms that slid westward over the Andes so often were. The thunder was closer, and the flickering flames of lightning illuminated the city in great green splashes of glare.

AS Bill trotted through the rain, he dismissed Grayson's warning and concentrated on the Chinese woman's murder. He had realized how difficult it would be to find the noseless man. He was going to go about it by placing himself in the noseless man's position. That is, if he were the murderer, what would he do? He would, Bill had decided without hesitation, somehow slip out of the country. How? There were several ways—planes, trains, automobiles, trucks, carts and boats.

He reached the police station and made further inquiries. A young lieutenant informed him that every possible exit from Lima had been and was being closely watched by the police; that every police officer was on the lookout for a man of the description that Bill had given.

Bill went out and walked rapidly through the rain toward the scene of the murder. At the mouth of the alley he stopped. The police had searched this alley. It ended against the side of an empty warehouse, all the windows of which were barred.

The only other windows opening on the alley were those of a private home. The occupants of the house, the well known and respected family of a wealthy wine merchant, had been questioned by the police. No one, they declared, had escaped through their house. But as there was no other direction for the murderer to have taken, the police had concluded that the noseless man must have entered the house through a window and escaped to the street, impossible though it seemed.

Bill carried his reasoning a step further. He obtained a flashlight at his hotel and walked down the alley to the end. There was a pile of small crates and wooden boxes, all too small for a man to hide in, stacked against the side of the warehouse. Above were two dark, barred windows.

As silently as possible, Bill pulled aside the box nearest the wall and his flashlight showed him what he had reasoned must be there. It was a small cellar window, protected by a rusty iron grille. This grille was hanging loose from the top of the little window, its lower fastenings having been wrenched out—perhaps by a desperate, powerful hand.

But the light of the electric torch revealed a detail even more interesting to Bill. It was a spot of bright color on the grille, a fragment of crimson silk caught on the rusty iron. It was, beyond doubt, a piece of the vivid silk shirt worn by the noseless man!

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Bill switched off his flashlight and considered. "If I," he thought, "were in that guy's boots, what would I do?"

He would, he decided, hide in the empty warehouse until dark. A storm had been coming up all evening. He would, if he were the noseless man, wait until the storm was in full swing before appearing on the police-patrolled streets. He would stand a far better chance of escape amid the crashing of thunder and downpour of rain.

Thus far the rain had been fairly gentle, the thunder but a threat in the distance.

"Therefore," Bill reasoned, "if this bird has as much sense as I have, he is still in the warehouse, waiting until the storm is making a hell of a noise and the visibility is bad and the cops' chins are tucked down on their chests."

So he lifted the iron grating, cautiously raised the window, and slid in feet first. His searching feet found the floor, and he stood erect in the darkness, breathing the sour, pungent smell of ancient, wine-soaked floors.

He listened. No sound disturbed the silence. He took a cautious step forward. A fist thudded against his shoulder!

As he staggered, taken by surprise, a knife blade slashed through the sleeve of his coat, and a man's body collided with his. Bill crashed to the floor. His breath was driven from his lungs.

He came slowly to his feet, staggering. His eyes, becoming used to the darkness, saw the man flitting away from him with the soft dark stealth of a bat; saw him swing up and climb through the window. Bill shook stars out of his head and lurched after him.

Once Bill had climbed through the window he saw the fugitive only at intervals, as though he were following a dark ghost. He had never supposed that a man, even aided by darkness, could disappear over such long periods of time. The noseless man darted from alley to alley, moving with speed and sureness. If Bill had not been so intent on capturing him, he was sure the man would have escaped.

A discovery he made early in the pursuit enabled Bill to chart a course. The noseless man was moving toward the water front. Yet the water front was well policed. Every few hundred feet there was an officer in a black rainproof, armed with a rifle. All were on the alert for the noseless murderer.

Near this zone, Bill lost the man for a moment—and thought he had lost him forever. He was running through mud toward what was evidently a small lumber yard at the northern end of the Embarcadero. Through the slashing rain, Bill saw the dim line of lights offshore where the City of Para lay at anchor. He was wondering, with puzzled feelings, if his quarry was headed for the little steamer, when he lost him in the rain-swept darkness.

He stopped and looked about angrily. He was about to walk southward and explore the ink-black shadows of the warehouses when a burst of green-white brilliance from the clouds picked out the fugitive flattened against a pile of lumber.

The flash of lightning etched upon Bill's mind two salient details—a broad black sombrero from the brim of which dangled small silver balls, and a scarlet silk or satin shirt, turned purple by rain, plastered against a lean but powerful chest.

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When Bill reached the lumber pile, the murderer was gone. There was a splash close at hand. The killer had gone off the dock!

Bill rejected the impulse to call for police assistance. If the police joined the pursuit, the gold fist would be lost to Bill. He crept through mud to the edge of the small wharf. He squatted down, and stared at the black water. Now and then, in the light from a distant street lamp, he saw a pellet of water spurting luminously, like a pearl, from the black surface. Then he saw the unmistakable sweep of a bare arm, well off shore.

There was no question about it. The killer of the Chinese woman, the present possessor of the gold fist, was swimming out toward the little steamer City of Para!

Bill put down the impulse to jump in and follow the fugitive. He shaded his eyes against the arc lights burning at long intervals along the scimitar of waterfront. He saw the sweep of the swimmer's arm again. He was still headed for the little steamer on which Bill intended to sail for New York. Watching intently, Bill saw him when he reached the bow of the ship, saw him, like a spider, slowly climb the anchor chain.

BILL knew all that he wished to know. He walked swiftly down the water front to the little landing stage where the launch was. Without taking his eyes from the steamer, he boarded the launch. When the launch left, a few minutes later, it was her last trip out to the steamer, and Bill, in the bows, kept his eyes on the steamer all of the way. He was certain now that the noseless man, once aboard, would not attempt to go back into the city.

The City of Para was a small ship, a typical coasting steamer of no more than four thousand tons and with only two decks. He had learned that she had taken a cargo of nitrate aboard, and was carrying a deck load of mining machinery consigned to Panama. The mining machinery, parts of a compressor and a hoist, were lashed down on the peak deck.

Bill went aboard, found the purser and paid for his passage to New York. It left him with less than fifty dollars. There were, the purser told him, three other passengers for New York and one for Panama. Bill had a stateroom to himself.

He had hardly stowed his suitcase there and returned to deck to begin his search, when a police launch came alongside. A half dozen officers under command of a sergeant came aboard and made a perfunctory, routine search. But the search for the murderer was abandoned when the sergeant discovered that the passenger for Panama was a political refugee. There was a great deal of angry conversation at the door of the political refugee's stateroom. Bill gathered that the refugee was traveling on a Bolivian diplomatic passport, and was therefore immune to arrest. At all events, he won his point, the police left without him, and shortly afterward the City of Para upped anchor and steamed out to sea.

CHAPTER IV.

THE ATTACK.

WHEN the police left Bill began his search for the man with the gold fist. He had travelled on ships of all sizes in all parts of the world, and he had a good knowledge

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of the places where a stowaway might hide. He began with the lifeboats, lifting their tarpaulins and peering into them with the aid of an electric pocket torch. He searched the engine room, the fire room, and he even looked about in the bunkers and in the shaft alley.

It was reasonable to suppose that the noseless man might have been hidden by a member of the crew. This possibility meant that all the crews' quarters must be searched. Bill searched as many as he could and made a note of the few which were locked. He searched the steering-engine house, then went forward. He crossed the forward well deck and climbed a short flight of stairs to the peak deck, where the mining machinery had been stowed.

Rain was still falling in torrents. Off to the starboard, a lighthouse beam swung bleakly across the black sky. Now and then lightning flashed and thunder roared. Reaching the top of the stairs, Bill rounded a tangle of machinery and flicked on his pocket torch. The white beam momentarily flooded the face of a man so close to Bill that, with one more step, he could have rubbed noses with him—except that the man had no nose.

Bill had thought he was prepared, but he wasn't. The brief glimpse of that hideous face, with its close-set black eyes, its bared teeth, almost sent him falling backward. He had meant to attack with the swift ferocity of a charging leopard, for he knew the man's spiderlike swiftness.

Bill leaped aside as the pocket torch was dashed from his hand. There was a glimmer of light from the masthead and Bill saw the glint of the knife in his enemy's hand, but nothing more. Two seconds late, Bill attacked. He dived low. One clawing hand found the middle of a body as hard as rawhide. He brought his other fist up and over. The blow drove the wind out of the noseless man with a hiss like that of a fighting cat's.

Both went down on the rain-swept deck. Bill drove hammerlike fists into an unseen face and body. The body suddenly went limp. Bill thought he had reduced his enemy to unconsciousness. He ran his hands swiftly over the man's sides to his trouser pocket. His fingers found a lump of warm metal the size of his fist in the left hand pocket. Bill snatched it out and transferred the lump to his own pocket. As he did so, the man without a nose came to life like a coiled spring.

Far overhead and to the south, lightning flickered greenly for seconds in the black sky. Bill, on hands and knees, saw the noseless man back swiftly to the rail with that knife, never relinquished, palmed in his hand. He was evidently taking no chances on another fight at close quarters.

He brought the knife up and behind him, well to one side. Obviously he meant to throw it. What happened was ironic, and horrible. As he darted back against the rail, he stumbled on a ringbolt in the deck; the handle of the knife struck the rail a split second ahead of his body, the knife was plunged its full length into him. And, still carried by the momentum of that stumbling motion, he did a fantastic back-flip and vanished overboard.

IT was more like nightmare than reality. Blackness had settled again. Beyond the rail and above it, the beam of the lighthouse swept palely across the night. As if he were rooted, Bill waited. Still on hands and knees, he was too shocked to move. Rain rattled on his bare head and

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drummed on his neck and back. Like a man under hypnosis, he crouched staring at the spot in the inky black where the noseless man had been.

Then the thought came that he should shout "Man overboard!" The ship should be put about and a search made. Yet a clearer second thought advised the folly of this. No man with a knife in his back could swim long enough to be saved; he had doubtless been dead when he fell over the rail.

It was a long time before Bill could fight down his horror and nausea. Even in his confusion, he realized one thing of importance: the affair had not been seen. The small area, enclosed by the mining machinery, was invisible from the wheelhouse, and there was no lookout on duty.

Bill picked up his flashlight and found that it was functioning. He flicked on the beam and approached the rail where the noseless killer had vanished, as a man might approach the spot where he has seen a ghost.

Faint crimson stained the trickle of rain water falling from the rail to the scuppers. A spurt of blood had drenched the rail, but the rain was washing it away. He made sure there was no other evidence, then walked aft, crossed the forward well, climbed to the main deck and went to his stateroom. He switched on the light, bolted the door and closed the shutter tight over the single window.

Then Bill sat down on the edge of the bunk and took that fist-sized lump of metal out of his pocket. Much too light in weight to be solid, it was a perfect replica in gold of a man's fist, tightly clenched, with the thumb overlapping three fingers just below the knuckles. The fist ended at the wrist joint, and the cross section of the wrist was neatly sealed with gold. Not only was the gold fist lifelike, but it had a decidedly human character. It was the fist of a wise man, clenched not in rage to strike, but in determination to hold a secret.

With exultation he scrutinized the fist of mystery—hand of fate, it seemed—with which he would win that fifteen million dollar pot. The back of the fist was covered with tiny, shallow markings—short, curved lines and short straight lines in a deliberate pattern.

Grayson had been certain that those tightly gripped golden fingers held the solution to an engineering or scientific problem worth unguessed millions. Just what was this secret? He was turning the fist over and over in his hands when, suddenly, with a little clicking sound, the cross section of the wrist flipped open like a tiny gate.

The fist was hollow. There was something inside which looked at first like a wadded-up spider—a great, blue-fringed spider. It proved to be a wad of twine of different colors. Bill hooked out the wad with his fingers, and was more mystified than before.

There was a central cord perhaps a quarter of an inch thick, a heavy blue cord. It was about a yard long. When Bill held up each end of this, dozens of smaller cords hung down in a sort of fringe.

These fine cords were of yellow, blue, green, red and black. Each had many knots. Some of the knots were single, others double, triple or quadruple. Many knots showed nine lumps.

These knots were spaced variously. But what they meant, what their purpose was, Bill was unable to say. All he discovered was the means by which he had opened the little square door in the base of the wrist. He found that

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by squeezing the thumb nail and the knuckle of the little finger, the door flipped open.

He studied the strange colored cordage for a long time. Somehow it heightened the mystery. It might explain everything, but it baffled Bill Lassiter.

He returned the cordage to the fist and snapped the little door shut. His plans were definite. He would reach New York on the morning of the last day that remained for him to earn, amass or accrue $50,000. He would take the fist to an expert and have it quickly explained. Then he would take the fist and the explanation to John Grayson's office and collect $100,000.

SO high-pitched was the scream, so thin and terrible that Bill, awakening, felt the hair at his nape bristle. He leaped from his bunk. The stateroom was bright. Sunlight fell in a shaft through the porthole.

The scream was pinched off. Bill reached under the pillow, made sure the gold fist was still there, and got into a dressing gown. He placed the fist in a pocket of the dressing gown, drew the belt tight about him, and ran out on deck.

As he opened the door the scream occurred again. It had a banshee note that made him shiver. It was uttered at the highest possible note in the vocal scale, so high, so thin that it was less sound than sensation.

He ran along the deck in the hot, bright sunlight of the tropical morning, tracing the screaming to its source. The unholy sound was coming from Stateroom 9. As Bill reached the door, it opened and a woman came out. She was strikingly beautiful. Bill guessed her age at twenty-six. Perhaps because of large dark eyes and a dark complexion, she had a gypsy air. She was in a summery white dress which emphasized the darkness of her skin and her large eyes.

She saw Bill and said "Oh!" as if he had startled her. Then she gave him a slow, sad smile.

"I hope," she said, "she didn't alarm you."

Bill snapped, "What's the matter?"

The gypsy-like woman shrugged. "She's hopelessly insane. You didn't know she was aboard?"

"No."

"We brought her aboard last night from Lima—my husband and I. Are you going to New York?"

"Yes."

The woman said, with her warm smile, "So are we. My name is Nita Chine."

Bill told her his name, and she shook his hand.

"It's such a tragic story. Perhaps you've heard of her—Sylvia Radkin?"

The name seemed familiar. "Young?" he asked.

"Yes. Oh, so young—so pathetically young, and lovely, for such a thing to happen. You must be curious, so I'll tell you the story, if you'd like. She fell rather desperately in love with a young man in the United States consular service in Valparaiso. It was a hopeless and incurable infatuation, beginning when she met the young man at a cocktail party in New York quite a few months ago. He was never more than mildly interested in Sylvia. I mean it was completely one-sided."

UP to that time, Mrs. Chine went on, the girl had been quite normal. Her infatuation for the vice-consul had led her to disregard

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convention and discretion. A few months after he had gone back to his post in Valparaiso, Sylvia Radkin had followed him. She was determined to marry him. She had begged the Chines to go with her. They had flown all the way from New York to Valparaiso.

And when they reached Valparaiso, the vice-consul was away on his honeymoon! He had married a Chilean girl, a young woman of the old Chilean nobility, had actually eloped with her.

Instantly upon hearing this, Sylvia Radkin lost her mind. The news was broken to her gently in her hotel room, in Valparaiso. She had run screaming out of the hotel, had picked up a chair and feloniously assaulted a Chilean sergeant of police. She had almost killed him.

Fighting and screaming like a wildcat, she had been overcome. Arrested, she had been promptly freed at the Chines' request on their promise that they would get her out of the country at once. The airline was unwilling to accept such a dangerous person as a passenger, so the Chines had engaged passage on a small coasting steamer which connected with the City of Para at Lima.

"It is necessary," Mrs. Chine said, "to keep the poor child in a straightjacket all of the time and to keep her under the influence of drugs."

At that moment the door of Stateroom 9 opened again and a man came out. From the instant he stepped over the threshold, Bill distrusted him. He was a heavily built man of about forty, a suave and dapper man with the blackest eyes Bill had ever seen in a human face. They had no pupils and, because of this, they possessed a curious hypnotic quality. They were the kind of eyes that never smiled. But the tight and rather cruel mouth was smiling now.

Nita Chine said, "Mr. Lassiter, this is my husband—Victor Chine."

Bill took Victor Chine's hand only because the amenities called for it. And he found the Chine hand cold and soft and somewhat moist.

"I was telling Mr. Lassiter about Sylvia," Mrs. Chine said.

Victor Chine looked at Bill with those pupil-less black eyes and sadly shook his head.

"It's tragic," he said heavily.

A steward came along the deck with a covered tray, which Mr. Chine took from him and carried into Stateroom 9. Bill excused himself, went into his own stateroom and dressed.

He met his fourth fellow passenger shortly before luncheon, although he had suspected his identity from the first glance. He was a tall and somewhat sinister-looking Bolivian—that type of South American who sometimes shockingly resembles Mephistopheles, with the long, furrowed, dark face, the deepset gloomy eyes and the saturnine air. He was, of course, the political refugee, and his name was Amador—Ramon Amador.

And Bill realized, before he had watched the man for very long, that Ramon Amador was something more than merely a political refugee. He attracted Bill's attention immediately after breakfast by his mysterious actions. He walked about the ship carrying a light Malacca stick and poking it here and there. Bill saw him lifting the tarpaulins of lifeboats and looking into their interiors, and saw him, both fore and aft, looking into lockers and into hatches. He had the air of a man trying hard not to give the impression of looking hard for something.

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Bill might not have noticed his casual prowlings if he had not gone through the same performance last night in his successful hunt for the noseless man, and it occurred to Bill that Ramon Amador was looking for the very thing that Bill had found.

SHORTLY before luncheon the political refugee seemed to have decided that it was useless to search further. He introduced himself to Bill. He was, Bill had sensed much earlier, a dangerous man, he was so poised, so polite, so suave, with the cold, ruthless eyes of an experienced killer. At least, that was Bill's impression. He recalled Grayson's warning: "Did you know there's a band of really ruthless super-criminals operating south of Panama? Be careful!"

When Ramon Amador suavely questioned Bill, the latter was certain on both points. Amador was extremely dangerous, and he was interested in the gold fist. How had Bill enjoyed Lima? Had he been in Peru very long? Why had he decided, at such short notice, to take the City of Para to the States?

These were sprinkled among other innocent questions. It was too polite to be called an inquisition or a cross-examination, but to Bill it was a third degree. He was certain that Ramon Amador had set the noseless man to the task of securing the gold fist, regardless of the number of killings involved, and had charged him to deliver the trophy aboard this ship. And Bill knew that Amador would kill him, if he felt it convenient, without the slightest hesitation.

For these powerful reasons Bill answered all questions with the frank, easy air of an innocent person. Yet it was soon evident that he did not clear himself entirely of suspicion. On the following afternoon, returning to his cabin after luncheon he found definite evidence that the room, all his belongings, had been minutely searched. He even found a series of pin holes in the lower sheet on his bunk, indicating that someone had thrust a long needle repeatedly through the mattress.

Bill had slept again with the gold fist under his pillow. He was carrying it in his pocket in the daytime. Yet that was dangerous. Once Ramon Amador awkwardly stumbled near him and lunged against him. He had run his hands along Bill's sides in recovering himself, but Bill was certain that the South American did not feel the gold fist in his pocket.

It was too dangerous to carry the fist. But where could he hide it?

He solved the problem that evening. He left the dinner table soon after the Bolivian came in. He went to Amador's own stateroom and placed the gold fist in the metal bowl of the lighting fixture which hung by small brass chains from the ceiling.

It was risky, but less risky than carrying it or hiding it elsewhere. Certainly Amador would not think of searching his own stateroom.

But he remained under suspicion, and he was shocked one evening by a conversation with the beautiful, gypsy-like Nita Chine. It was one of those moonlit nights of sheer beauty that only the South American coast can afford. Bill was standing at the rail when Nita Chine came and stood beside him. She took his arm and squeezed it a little. Since he had met her, she had been a little more than merely friendly. Often, he had discovered her large, beautiful eyes fixed on his face with a mystic little smile. He had supposed that she was tired of

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her husband and was willing to have a flirtation.

TONIGHT she verified at least part of his suspicion. She unburdened her soul to Bill. She wept a little and told him how utterly bored she was with Victor. She clung to his arm as if she needed his support. She said she was starved for love. Bill said nothing.

The coastline could almost but not quite be seen in the silver brilliance. Leaning her elbows on the rail, Nita Chine gazed across the expanse of magic ocean and sighed.

"It's such a mysterious land," she whispered. "Oh, the secrets that are locked up in the heart of that country!"

Bill had seen other women grow sentimental under moons like this, and he said nothing. She dreamily went on to tell him about the ancient Inca civilization, of which she seemed to know a great deal, and as she talked her hand slipped under Bill's elbow and gently pressed his arm. It was a steady pressure, and Bill soon discovered the reason for it.

She talked about the undiscovered treasures of the Incas, of the great Incan cities still unfound in the wildness of the Andes and the jungles beyond. She mentioned precious relics which had been found.

Suddenly she whispered: "Did you ever hear of the gold fist?"

If Bill had not been slightly wary of Mrs. Chine, he might have betrayed himself to that sensitive, waiting hand on his arm. He might have stiffened or jerked. But he did not.

"The what?" he asked innocently.

"The gold fist."

"No," he said, as if he were only politely interested and not in the least curious. "What's the gold fist?"

"Don't talk so loud," she cautioned him.

Bill gave her a look of surprise. "Why not?"

"Because," she whispered, "it's the most dangerous relic ever found in an Inca ruin. Are you sure you've never seen it or heard of it?"

"Never," Bill answered calmly. "What's it all about?"

The pressure of her hand had relaxed.

"Oh, it's just a priceless old relic," she said. "I'm sure everyone in Peru has heard of it. I thought you must have."

"Why is it so priceless?" Bill asked. "How much does it weigh?"

"It isn't the weight, it's the information it reveals."

"What information?"

"No one seems to know," Mrs. Chine mysteriously whispered.

She retired soon after that and did not again mention the gold fist. Señor Amador did not mention the relic to Bill, but he skirmished all about the subject, always watching Bill with his Mephistophelean eyes. Any doubts Bill might have felt about him were dismissed when, in Panama, Ramon Amador did not leave the ship, but announced his intention to go on to New York on a diplomatic mission.

Yet the remainder of the voyage was uneventful. Nearing New York, Bill radioed his cousin Homer the date and probable hour of his arrival, and requested him to get in touch with him as soon as possible after he had landed. Homer Lassiter was a scientist of sorts, and he would doubtless be able to put Bill in touch with a man who who could explain away the mystery of the gold fist. Once that secret was solved, the fist and its wisdom delivered to John B. Grayson and Bill's

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bet won, there was another mystery for him to tackle. Who was Joanna? Bill felt that New York was the place to unravel that mystery, too.

CHAPTER V.

NEWS HAWKS.

EARLY one morning the City of Para crept through raw, billowing fog toward Quarantine. Trumpeting warnings at brief intervals, she was answered by the voices of ghostly shipping all about her. If the fog did not hold him up, Captain Mallory promised to be docked by noon.

It was an uneasy morning. Since dawn the insane girl had screamed several times.

Bill paced the deck until the breakfast gong rang. In all of his years of entering New York harbor from all parts of the world, he had never been so stimulated. Whether he would step ashore safely was still something of a question. Once again, his cabin had been thoroughly searched. Sometime last night when he was having a farewell highball with Captain Mallory, some one had gone through his belongings; more needles had been stabbed through the mattress; the carpet had been lifted; every inch of the cabin had been carefully gone over.

This morning there was another development. Several members of the crew, mostly from the steward's department, had visited Ramon Amador's cabin, and since then Bill had been aware that he was under constant surveillance. Wherever he went, eyes seemed to be upon him. He was sure that Amador would try to prevent his getting ashore with the gold fist.

Just as the breakfast gong sounded, the radio operator came along the deck with a telegram for Bill.

EVERY REPORTER IN NEW YORK
PANTING FOR YOUR ARRIVAL.
HOMER.

Bill went into the dining room and ordered breakfast. Mr. and Mrs. Chine were not in the dining room. Usually one of them ate while the other stood guard over the insane girl. His breakfast came, but Bill found he was not hungry.

Over his coffee cup he saw Ramon Amador, down the table, watching him with his cryptic eyes. Bill finished his breakfast and went back on deck, wondering how to outwit the sinister Bolivian. When the ship reached Quarantine, he found his opportunity. A gray launch puffed up alongside the City of Para and a young man came on deck looking for Bill Lassiter.

He wore a trench coat with a turned-up collar, and a somewhat battered felt hat. Bill recognized him. He was a reporter. He spoke to Bill briskly.

"You're William J. Lassiter, aren't you?"

Over the reporter's shoulder, Bill saw Ramon Amador staring at him as he walked slowly aft.

"I'm Bill Lassiter."

There was a strange sparkle in the reporter's eyes which Bill did not understand.

"I'm a friend of your cousin's," the reporter said. "Homer sent me with a boat down the bay to meet you so you could duck the reporters."

Bill now understood the sparkle in the reporter's eyes, and he restrained a sparkle in his own. Fate, as he looked at it, had thrown him a lifeline.

"That was white of Homer," Bill said. "Wait here just a moment."

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He acted with speed. He ran up the deck to Amador's stateroom, the door of which was latched back. He went in, took the gold fist out of the lighting fixture, then ran to his cabin. His suitcase was packed. He grabbed it and started out. A steward blocked the doorway.

Bill brushed past him.

The man cried, "Wait, sir!" and when Bill did not pause, he reached out with a long, thin arm and slipped a folded piece of paper into the right-hand pocket of Bill's coat.

Bill, unaware of this, strode on and said to the reporter, "All right! Come on!"

He saw Amador and two stewards rounding the forward turn of the deck. Bill boarded the gray launch. The reporter followed him. One of the stewards started running, but by the time he reached the rail the gray launch was moving away.

The Bolivian looked down at Bill from the rail. His dark eyes were expressionless, but his thin satanic lips smiled.

He called to Bill, "*Hasta la vista, señor!*"

There was something about the political refugee's smile that indicated that he might have other cards up his sleeve.

NOW there was another development. From every conceivable hiding place aboard the launch, men and women, mostly young, came crowding out to surround Bill. They were all reporters. It had been a neat trick. They had thought he would refuse to talk when the boat docked, and had virtually kidnapped him. Bill was grateful. His escape from Señor Amador seemed perfect.

Some of the reporters had cameras. Lenses began to click. Questions began to patter upon him like rain on a roof. It appeared that Bill's bet with Ladorna Whipple had been widely published and the press of New York was determined to have details.

But what interested Bill was not the nature of the questions but the tone in which they were fired at him. He had been questioned by reporters before. Always he had answered their questions good-naturedly. Often his very amiability had made the published interviews sound a little foolish. There was the time he had been reported engaged to a widowed countess. There had been the duel he had fought on polo ponies, with polo mallets for weapons, with the insolent elder son of the Gaekwar of Baroda. On these and on other occasions, Bill had talked too freely, trusting to the good sportsmanship of the reporters. And they had made him a laughing stock.

Now the reporters were treating him as if he were a silly ass. Sharply he realized that such he must have been. But no longer.

"Come on, Bill, loosen up!" a red-headed young man begged familiarly. "What's the low-down?"

A black-mustached man chimed in: "We want to know about that bet you've got on, Bill. Are you going to win it?"

"I understand," Bill answered, "that the average annual rainfall in Abyssinia is twenty-three inches."

There was a roar of protest at this trick of evasion so commonly practiced by visiting diplomats.

"What luck did you have in South America?"

"Did you make that fifty grand?"

"A little warm milk," Bill replied, "sipped slowly just before retiring will often cure insomnia."

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"Is it true that you're going to marry Gloria Vandergraft," a woman reporter inquired, seizing one of Bill's lapels, "if you don't win that bet?"

"Did you know," Bill answered, "that a pound of gold weighs more at the Equator than it does at the North Pole?"

"Aw, come off that polo pony, Bill, and give us a story."

"How much is this bet?" another reporter asked, holding up a morning tabloid. The headline read:

BET-A-BILLION BACK!

Bill read that "Bet-a-Billion Bill Lassiter, the playboy," was returning this morning from Peru. He pushed his way out of the pack and went to the bow. A blond girl with large blue eyes followed him timidly. As she approached his wide, stern back her big blue eyes filled with tears.

"Oh, Mr. Lassiter," she quavered, "won't you give poor little me a story? It means so much to me."

Bill looked at the pretty face, with its liquid eyes, its tremulous pink lips.

"Please, Bill! I'll be fired if I don't get a story," she whimpered.

Bill hesitated for a moment, but if he had realized that this girl was known in the newspaper profession as "Sobbing Sally," he would not even have paused. He looked down at her and said brusquely: "Roll your hoop, sister."

Sobbing Sally gave him a cold stare. "Nuts," she said tearlessly.

Bill was a little worried by that parting smile of Ramon Amador's. The instant he reached home he must set about having the gold fist and that strange-colored fringe explained, so that he could collect $100,000 from John B. Grayson before midnight tonight!

In the bows he watched the great ominous mass of New York looming out of the fog. He had never realized that New York could look so foreboding. It was like a challenge. If he could have looked a little way into the mist-shrouded future, his feeling of gloom would have been even heavier.

CHAPTER VI.

CLOUDS.

RIDING up Park Avenue in a taxicab toward the tall and handsome building atop which was his penthouse, one of the largest and most luxurious of these skyline chateaux, Bill Lassiter tried to relax. He loved New York. He was always glad to return to his luxurious penthouse, after the self-imposed hardships of hunting or exploring in some remote jungle or mountainous region. But this morning he could not see it. Everything above the fifteenth story of the building was shrouded in fog.

The doorman and the elevator men received him with their usual acclaim. He was whisked up forty-two stories. His butler, Withers, was waiting with the door open, with his warmest smile.

Footmen and other servants in a line behind Withers all chorused, at sight of Bill:

"Welcome home, Mr. Lassiter!"

They always seemed so genuinely delighted when he returned. From the austere and formidable Withers to Jenny, the chef's helper, he liked them.

As he strode into the great entrance hall, they complimented him on his wonderful appearance. Obviously, they wanted to ask questions. They wanted to know what the chances were of his winning that outrageous bet. If he didn't win that bet, they would, all of

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them, soon lose their jobs. But they were too well trained to ask such questions. At a stern glance from Withers, they silently scattered. Bill passed on through the reception room, a living room, a magnificent library, with Withers at his heels.

"Mr. Lassiter," Withers said, with a little apologetic cough, "may I have just a moment?"

Bill stopped. "Certainly, Withers. What is it?"

"It's the servants, sir."

"What's the matter with them?"

"They're very curious to know whether there is any likelihood of your winning that bet?"

Bill smiled. "So they're curious, eh?"

"Yes, Mr. Lassiter. They haven't been paid in eight months. You know what a loyal staff this is, sir. They would—"

"Eight months!" Bill barked.

"Yes, sir."

"My lawyer should have attended to that. Why didn't you call him?"

"I did, sir. But he said that Miss Whipple had refused to let him pay the wages, and, according to the terms of some agreement you signed with her, she had that right."

"I'll attend to it," Bill said. "Get Mr. John B. Grayson, of Grayson and Clark, on the phone at once, then telephone my cousin Homer to come here immediately."

He thrust his hands into his pockets, and the fingers of his right hand closed on a piece of paper.

> Why haven't you tried to help me? I have tried to communicate with you, but they have always stopped me. A steward has promised to give you this. Have the Chines arrested—anything, but rescue me at once. Hurry! Please! JOANNA.

Bill stared at it for a moment in stunned disbelief. He remembered the mysterious behavior of the steward as he was leaving. Joanna! The girl in Stateroom 9! Not an insane girl at all, but his beautiful, mysterious, romantic Joanna—a prisoner of the Chines!

"Withers!" Bill snapped. "Get in touch with the officials at the pier where the City of Para is docking! Tell them to hold a couple named Chine until I get there!"

Withers obeyed. Presently he reported:

"The ship has docked, sir, and all the passengers have gone."

"Then get Mike McClurg on the phone—quick!"

He paced nervously up and down the room. He would have McClurg hire the entire forces of the half-dozen best detective agencies in New York, and turn them all loose on the hunt for Joanna and the Chines. He would find her, he swore, if he died in the attempt.

A parlor maid approached. "Mr. Lassiter, a young lady is on the phone asking for you and says it's very urgent."

"I'm in to no one," Bill answered, "but Mr. McClurg, Mr. Grayson, and my cousin."

The parlor maid hesitated. "She said to tell you the name is Joanna—just Joanna."

"Joanna!"

Bill strode to the nearest telephone. Among Bill's luxuries was his own private switchboard. To his operator he directed, "Switch that call to me." A voice said, "Yes, I'm waiting."

"Joanna!" Bill cried.

"Mr. Lassiter, I just wanted you to know I've been released. Everything is all right. I'm quite safe, but there is great danger for you if you try to find me. You must not. Good-by."

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"Wait a minute!" Bill shouted. The line went dead. He signalled his operator and shouted: "Trace that call, Mildred!"

"Yes, sir," the switchboard girl answered, "that's what I've been doing, Mr. Lassiter. Just a moment."

Bill waited. Mildred reported, in a moment, that the call had come from a pay telephone in the Grand Central station.

It didn't make sense. Joanna had been kept a captive all the way from Lima to New York. Why had she been released instantly after landing?

A minute later Mildred reported that John B. Grayson was on the wire.

"Hello, Bill," said Grayson. "I see by the papers that Bet-a-Billion is back in town."

"Grayson, I've got the gold fist."

"No!"

"Yes. I'm taking it to an expert to have it deciphered and I'll be in your office to collect that hundred thousand inside of an hour."

"Good work! I'll be here all afternoon."

Bill placed the phone in its cradle. Withers was standing beside him.

"Mrs. Dearwester is waiting to see you, Mr. Lassiter, in the small drawing room. You remember her, sir. She is the matron of the Happy Hundred."

"I'm too busy, now, Withers."

"She says it's quite urgent, sir. She's been here since 8 A.M."

"All right." Bill went on toward the small drawing room. He didn't want to see Mrs. Dearwester. He had too much on his mind.

THE white-haired old lady was sitting meekly with folded hands in her lap. She smiled as he came in. She looked thinner than she had a year ago, and shabbier.

"Well, Bill," she greeted him, "I hope you had a fine, successful trip."

"Thank you, Mrs. Dearwester."

He saw that her eyes were anxious, and that her hands, in the lap of that absurd coat, were clutched together.

"Did—did you win that bet, Bill? Oh, please don't think I'm just being inquisitive. It's the Happy Hundred."

Bill felt more and more uncomfortable. Not at any time since he had made that bet with Ladorna Whipple had he felt quite so mean.

"We've been having quite a hard time, Bill," she went on. "Soon after you went away, the checks stopped coming. I called your lawyer right away. He told me everything was tied up. It's been nip and tuck ever since."

She had been trying all these months to run the Happy Hundred on money that she had begged and bullied from all of Uncle Ben's wealthy friends. It had been easy at first, but harder as time went on. Lately, she had had no luck whatsoever.

"All the rich people are either touchy or untouchable, or broke. We've got just about enough food for iron rations for three more days. If something doesn't happen within three days, those children will have to be parcelled off to state institutions. I wish you'd come out and see them, Bill."

Bill said huskily, "Is that little one in pink — Maggie — is she on iron rations, too?"

"They're all on iron rations."

The phone in the small drawing room rang. Bill answered it. Mike McClurg, his lawyer, was calling.

"Hello, Bill! Did you win that bet?"

"Not yet. Listen. What's all this about my servants' wages being stopped, and the checks to the Happy Hundred being cut off?"

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"I'm sorry, Bill. Whipple put her foot down. She said not a dime was to go to your servants or the Happy Hundred or anything else. She threatened to take me into court. In spite of the fact that that damned fool agreement you signed with her is outrageous and preposterous, a court would uphold her. Why don't you marry that girl?"

"What girl?"

"Whipple!"

Bill broke the connection and asked the operator for his Long Island residence. To his head groom, he said:

"I want you to sell all my horses at once. Any reasonable offer will be accepted. I want a flat offer for the entire stable."

"I'm sorry, Mr. Lassiter," the head groom said, "but I've had orders that none of these horses are to be sold. Miss Whipple got a court order."

Bill hung up the receiver more in wonder than in anger. Ladorna Whipple was out to beat him by any means, fair or foul. She had doubtless tied up his cars and his Diesel yacht in the same way. Two more phone calls verified this suspicion.

He said to Mrs. Dearwester: "Take another hitch in all belts—and don't worry! I'm going to win that bet!"

IN Homer Lassiter's laboratory the phone began to ring. Homer Lassiter let it ring. He was just concluding an experiment with a powerful ultra-violet ray generator; studying the effects of a tremendous volume of these invisible rays upon various substances, and obtaining results that were not only satisfactory but somewhat startling.

He was obtaining colors that he had never seen before in his life: phantom purples, amazing shades of magenta, wicked ghostly greens. Even after the specimens of rock were withdrawn from the invisible ultra-violet stream, the rocks glowed amazingly in the darkness.

The telephone continued to ring. Lassiter said, "Oh, hell!" shut off the machine, switched on an electric bulb that flooded his darkroom with a blinding white glare, and picked up the receiver.

He said, "Hello," peevishly. He was not ordinarily a peevish little man; only when interrupted in the midst of an exciting experiment. His recent work with ultra-violet rays was taking him into such wildly exciting fields, such weird new fields, that he hated to spare a moment from it.

A suave, modulated voice said into his ear: "Mr. Lassiter, this is Mr. William J. Lassiter's butler, Withers. Mr. Lassiter has just returned from South America, and he has asked me to communicate with you. He wishes to know if it will be convenient for you to call at the penthouse at once."

"I'll be right over, tell him," Homer Lassiter said, and slammed the receiver on the hook.

He put on his round gray felt hat, locked his laboratory, and went down a short hall and let himself into Fifty-eighth Street. He was a small, mousy man with very pale skin and freckles and he had the characteristic absent-minded air of the scientific man. Hands deep in the pockets of his coat, he trudged eastward along Fifty-eighth Street toward Park Avenue.

On the way to Bill's penthouse, Homer had a curious adventure. It did not seem important at the time, not at all like an adventure. The foggy day was rather depressing. Thick clouds hung low in the canyons of New York, and from the bottom of these clouds a thinner mist hung down. The

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clouds of fog seemed to press down on the roofs, to press down on the roof of one's very spirit.

Homer was aware, as he plodded along, that he did not feel very well. His eyes were sore and tender.

LITTLE by little a feeling grew upon him which he had experienced before, that the world was not very real. His experiments with ultra-violet rays had convinced him that there is much more to any substance than meets the naked eye. Nothing, he reflected, is what it seems.

He crossed Fifth Avenue without relieving that strange sickly feeling. The sidewalk was glassy with moisture. Sounds were strangely muffled.

The sidewalks were packed with lunch-hour crowds. Among these hundreds of faces, Homer Lassiter noticed that an occasional face looked somewhat dim or mistily defined. He thought it was the state of his eyes. He was not alarmed until he suddenly saw a man who had no face at all.

This occurred near the corner of Fifty-eighth and Madison. The man, who was tall and well dressed, was complete except for his face. He had a hat, a necktie, a collar, shoulders, arms and legs. Everything was present except a face.

Homer Lassiter tried looking away and back again quickly. But the man still lacked a face. Where his face should have been was a pink blank oval, a fairly clean-cut outline of a face except that the features—the nose, the mouth, the eyes—were all missing.

No matter how quickly or deliberately Homer Lassiter tried to look away and back again, the man's face was still an oval blank, giving off a faintly pink irradiation.

The effect upon Homer Lassiter was to heighten his feeling of ill-being. As the faceless man passed, Homer turned. But the man's face, in profile, was still blank. Standing at the curbstone, Homer Lassiter watched the faceless man start across Madison Avenue. The traffic light was against him. He dodged expertly through the moving lines of vehicles, almost reaching the opposite side when an express truck came around the corner.

Homer Lassiter saw the truck coming, saw it turning the corner and leaning because it was traveling at such high speed. He saw the faceless man try to avoid being run down, saw him slip and fall on the shiny wet pavement. The truck ran over him.

Homer Lassiter could see the man lying in the street, and his face was now clearly visible to him. It was the face of a strange man of about fifty.

With fascination, Homer looked on while a woman screamed, crowds gathered, an ambulance came. Long before the ambulance came, the report went through the crowd that the man was dead. He had been killed instantly.

Homer was neither shocked nor horrified. It was the first time he had seen a man killed before his eyes, and he was a little surprised that it did not make him ill. He attached no importance to the fact that the unfortunate man's face had been invisible before his death, and visible immediately afterward.

CHAPTER VII.

BLURRED FACES.

HOMER trudged on to Park Avenue and up to the apartment house the top two floors of which comprised Bill Lassiter's penthouse.

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He was whisked upward in an express elevator. A moment later Withers was opening the door and looking at him with that sad, slightly scornful air that butlers always seemed to reserve for Homer.

Bill met him in his sitting room, with its view, over intervening roofs, of Central Park. But it was a Bill he hardly knew—leaner, harder-looking and copper-plated from the blast of the Peruvian sun.

"The funniest thing happened to me on my way up here, Bill," Homer began. "I was walking along and I saw this fellow without any face."

"What fellow?"

"I don't know who he was. I couldn't see his face. It was just a pink blur. As he started to cross Madison, a truck hit him and killed him."

"That's funny," Bill agreed. He stared intently at Homer a moment and said, "You don't look very well, Homer. Are you still spending all your time in that damp cellar?"

"Yes. It's fascinating work."

Bill rang for Withers and told him to bring Mr. Lassiter a Scotch and soda.

"You look so damned pale, Homer," Bill said. "You look like a ghost."

"It's your face," Homer said unsteadily. "At first it was clear and sharp, and now it's sort of fuzzy. I do feel queer."

"You'd better see an oculist. Those funny rays are giving you the jimjams. Are you getting enough to eat?"

"As a matter of fact, no. You see —Well, the truth is, my allowance from Uncle Ben was suddenly snipped off."

"Snipped —" Bill began, and reached for the telephone, but quickly withdrew his hand.

"Until a couple of months after his death," Homer explained, "Uncle Ben had been sending me regularly a thousand a month. And he didn't leave me a dime in his will. You know, I'm actually only his step-nephew. You were his favorite. However, he approved of my scientific work, and he wanted to help along with my experiments, so he was sending me this thousand every month."

Bill grimly broke in: "I understand. He expected me to keep it up."

"But can you, Bill?"

"Don't worry, Homer. You'll be back on the payroll by midnight tonight at the latest."

"Or not at all," Homer murmured. "Do you really expect to win that bet?"

"Certainly!"

"How?"

"Wait here a moment."

Bill left the room. When he came back, Homer cried: "Bill! I can hardly see your face!"

Bill placed the gold fist on the table beside Homer. And Homer said, excitedly, "Now your face is in sharp focus again!"

"Never mind my face, Homer. Concentrate on this. You see this thing?"

"It's a gold fist."

"It's thousands of years old. It's Incan, and it's the key to a great engineering secret. I must know the secret gripped by these golden fingers! Who can I trust—some absolutely honest and dependable archæologist. I'll pay him handsomely."

"Dr. Bruce Orwood," Homer promptly answered. "He is the greatest archæologist in America. He used to be a field man with the Carnegie Institute, later with Smithsonian, later with the American Museum of

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Natural History. He spent years in the Andes. He is the greatest living authority on the Incas. I happen to know that he is about to lose his house. He is terribly hard up."

"Where does he live?"

"Near Gramercy Park. When will you see him?"

"Now! Call him up!"

Homer telephoned to Dr. Orwood, who said he would see Bill immediately.

THE two cousins left the penthouse, Bill taking his town car to Gramercy Park, and Homer going afoot to Fifth Avenue.

But Homer did not return to his cellar laboratory. He still felt uneasy and slightly ill. His eyes were still playing tricks. He decided to take a brisk walk through Central Park, to stay in the fresh air until he felt better. As he entered the park he noticed a man coming toward him at a brisk walk, almost a trot. All that Homer could see of the man indicated that he was fat. He had fat shoulders and fat hands. Homer could not see his face. That tricky business in his eyes was occurring again.

Homer's feeling of uneasiness grew. He suffered a moment of panic. Was he losing his eyesight? He glanced rather wildly at other pedestrians. Their faces were all quite clear.

He swung his eyes back to the fat man. And the part of his brain that was cool and scientific decided his course of action. Grimly, he turned and followed the fat man. It was a strange experiment. Would the stout stranger, like the man on Madison Avenue, meet with violent death?

The man paused at Fifth Avenue and hailed a Washington Square bus. He climbed to the top. Homer followed, and sat where he could observe the man's actions. The top of the bus, in spite of the fog, was crowded. Homer, with hands that were not quite steady, lighted a cigarette and waited.

Just before the bus reached Madison Square, the fat man gasped loudly, clutched at his breast, and pitched out of his seat. He struck the back of the seat ahead of him with the top of his head, knocking off his hat.

Then he slid sidewise and rolled into the aisle.

A woman shrieked for the conductor. Homer stared at the limp fat man in the aisle. He could see his face quite clearly now. It was round, white and unfamiliar. He knew that the man was dead.

Terror suddenly overwhelmed Homer. It was as if he had suddenly found himself at the brink of a horrible bottomless pit. His mind raced in a panic, trying to get a grip on reality. He was rattled, not at the sight of death for the second time today, but because of the curious trick his vision had played each time. If a curtain had been torn aside, giving him a glimpse into the hereafter, he could not have been more frightened.

His mind groped for a logical answer. In his experiments with invisible light rays he had seen colors that no human eye had seen before. Had these rays somehow worked on the delicate membranes of his eyes, giving him an uncanny ability to see strange vibrations from the faces of human beings when their lives were nearing an end? Unlikely, perhaps, but not beyond all possibility. Was it not possible to take clear photographs in absolute darkness with invisible infra-red rays?

Shivering, Homer descended from the bus. He felt a frantic need to

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escape from something he didn't understand.

ALL the way down to Gramercy Park, Bill had the uncomfortable knowledge that he was being followed. A yellow taxicab had pulled out from the curb when he had left the penthouse in his town car, and this cab stayed persistently behind him all the way. The passenger was a dark-skinned man, but he was not Ramon Amador.

Never, so far as he knew, had Bill been shadowed except perhaps by reporters. When he was certain that the dark-skinned man in the yellow cab was following him, he became uneasy. Four blocks from the archæologist's house, Bill dismissed his car and walked on rapidly, arriving by a circuitous route. He looked back several times. Apparently he had shaken off his pursuer.

Dr. Bruce Orwood lived in a small, old fashioned brownstone house not far from the park. A house man with the curious Mongoloid cast of countenance that often characterizes Latin-Americans of the lower classes opened the door to Bill's ring.

"Mr. Lassiter?" he said, in slurred accents. "Dr. Orwood is expecting you, sar. This way, please."

Bill followed the dark-skinned man through a comfortable, old-fashioned living room, the walls of which were adorned with hideous masks, crossed spears and other souvenirs of distant travel, through a stuffy library into a study.

Here, at a desk, sat a bent-shouldered old man with a white spade beard, scrawling with a pencil on a thick pad of yellow paper. He looked over the top of his steel-rimmed spectacles.

"Dr. Orwood," Bill said briskly, "I want to find out what this is."

He took the gold fist out of his pocket and placed it on the desk.

The archæologist readjusted his steel-rimmed spectacles. He picked up the fist. He looked at it closely. Then he looked at Bill. He had been smiling. He was not smiling now. It was obvious that he was laboring under great excitement.

"This!" he cried. "Why! It's the gold fist! Where did you get it?"

"That doesn't matter," Bill said. "The point is, it's worth a fortune. I know that, but I don't know why. I will pay you generously for a full explanation of it."

Dr. Orwood put the fist down as if it had suddenly grown hot. He blinked his eyes rapidly at Bill through the thick lenses.

"I suppose you know," he said, "that this is the most dangerous toy a man can possibly own."

"I guessed that. But why? Let's have both barrels."

The old man looked a little pale, more than a little scared. He shook his head. He pushed the fist a few inches toward Bill as if he did not relish having such a dangerous object so close to him.

"I prefer not to have anything to do with it, Mr. Lassiter. Take it to some one else. I prize my life too highly."

"But what is it?"

"I—I don't know."

Bill pressed the golden thumb nail and the golden knuckle. The little gate flipped open. Bill pulled out the colored cordage.

* * *

The dark-skinned man in the yellow taxicab had cautiously followed Bill Lassiter on foot after the young man dismissed his car. He carefully ob-

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served the house Bill had entered and finally went, not to the front door, but into a narrow passage which led to the rear. At the back door, he knocked.

Dr. Orwood's house man opened the door. The other man said, "Your name is Felipe Rodriguez?"

"Yes, *señor.*"

"Your number is Eight-Five-Nine-C-Ten?"

"Yes, *señor.*"

"You are notified that Ramon Amador, of Peru, is in New York. Listen carefully to the following instructions."

* * *

Dr. Orwood was looking at the colored fringe which Bill had removed from the inside of the gold fist. The archæologist had a look of pain.

"It's a *quipu,* of course," he said.

"A what?"

"*Quipu.*" He pronounced it "kee-poo." He took it reluctantly from Bill and straightened it out on the desk with his long, waxen fingers.

"What does it say?"

"A *quipu* always contains some kind of arithmetical message," Dr. Orwood answered. "The *quipu* was invented, or devised, by the Incas for much the same purpose that the Chinese devised the abacus. But not simply as a counter. A verbal explanation generally went along with a *quipu.* Each of these colors and each of these knots has a meaning. They may refer to numbers, dates or calculations. Some *quipus* refer to silver, others to gold, others to corn or soldiers. Peruvian shepherds still use them to keep a record of their flocks."

"What does this *quipu* say?"

The archæologist studied the string in silence for perhaps five minutes.

"It would take me at least a couple of hours to answer that question," he said. "It's the explanation of an engineering problem. You'll notice the lines all over the back of the fist in a sort of ordered, or geometrical, arrangement. The string will explain the precise meaning of these lines."

Dr. Orwood suddenly and unexpectedly shot out one long, pale hand, scooped up the *quipu* and covered the gold fist, all in one quick gesture.

"Well, what is it, Felipe?"

Bill was not aware until then that the house man had come into the study on silent feet, carrying a silver tray on which stood two tall tumblers filled with a pale amber liquid and ice cubes.

THERE was a brief exchange between master and servant in Spanish too rapid for Bill to understand. Bill was aware of strange undercurrents. He had been startled by that quick concealment of the fist and the *quipu,* and by Dr. Orwood's obvious distrust of the servant, and he wondered a little at Dr. Orwood's clutching, greedy gesture as his hand had reached out. When Felipe was gone, the archæologist uncovered the fist and the knotted cord. Bill tasted his highball. It was excellent Scotch. Dr. Orwood's eyes, behind the thick lenses of his spectacles, were wary.

"Will you translate it for twenty-five thousand?" Bill said.

"Yes. Take the fist. Return at five o'clock."

Bill asked his permission to use the telephone. He looked up the number of Grayson and Clark. To Mr. Grayson he said:

"There's been a little delay. How long will you be at your office?"

"Until five. After that, at the Century Club."

"Don't forget to take your checkbook along," Bill said.

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"Are you sure you'll need it?"

"Quite sure." Bill said grimly.

There was a lengthy silence, then the president of Grayson and Clark said:

"I think I ought to warn you, Bill, that several other people expect to sell me that fist. I don't know how they expect to get it away from you, but—watch your step!"

"The check you write," Bill said, "is going to be made payable to me."

Mr. Grayson laughed, but there was a note of doubt in his laugh. "I hope so, Bill."

Bill hung up, told Dr. Orwood that he would see him at five o'clock sharp, and went out. He saw no yellow cab in the neighborhood, no lurking figures. Apparently he had eluded his trailer.

He started for the Eighteenth Street subway entrance. He wanted to go next to the New York Evening Globe. Less than a block from Dr. Orwood's, a strange thing happened. He had a brief but violent spell of dizziness. Then slowly it seemed as if the moon was breaking through the fog. A slanting ray formed a pool of silver at his feet.

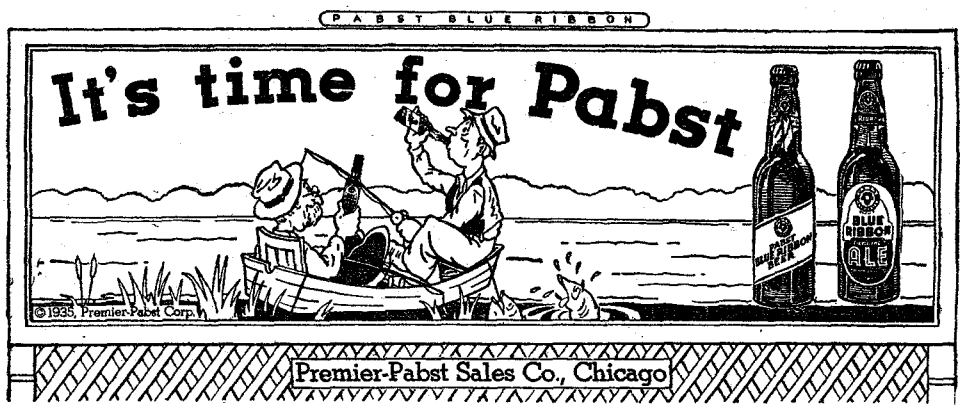
Bill felt an urge to climb the moonbeam. It was not slippery; but there was a sudden interruption. A number of men were coming down the beam, and their obvious intention was to crowd him off into space. He had never seen human beings quite so large. The first seemed twelve feet tall.

There was a ferocious expression on the giant's face, but Bill did not hesitate to attack him. Suddenly Bill was surrounded by moon men, all intent on tearing him to shreds.

Then a pair of gigantic men in blue uniforms with brass buttons added themselves to the fray. Save that they were twelve feet high, they resembled New York policemen. With their sticks they attacked the moon men.

Bill saw a sudden explosion of silvery light, as if the moonbeam had disintegrated. He felt himself falling thousands of feet through space. Then he found himself lying on the sidewalk. An ambulance with shrieking siren pulled up at the curb and a man in white came trotting over.

TO BE CONTINUED NEXT WEEK.



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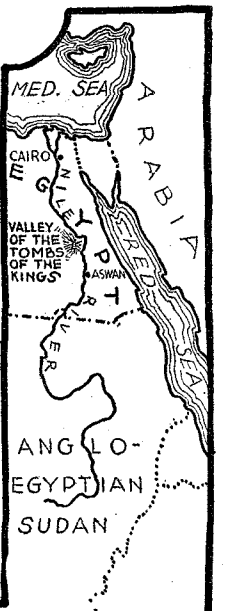
Wonders of the World

BEHIND a barrier of cliffs, not very far from the west bank of the Nile, is a desolate valley, barren of trees, wild and lonely. Here it was that the wealthy Pharaohs of ancient Thebes buried their dead in secret. Usually the mouth of a tomb was filled with stones and débris so that marauders could not pillage the funeral trappings of the illustrious dead.

Up and down the ridges of this wild valley were numerous tombs having elaborate structure and ornate decorations. Some of the royal coffins were made of pink granite and even of alabaster. In time the great valley became so honeycombed with sepulchral passages and chambers that earlier entrances were often obliterated, and sometimes a Pharaoh would excavate a tomb practically on top of a previous one. This happened when Rameses VI built driectly above the tomb of Tutankhamen.

Thus it is that the Valley of the Kings, apparently a deserted waste, is really the most populous city of the dead in the world.



The VALLEY of the TOMBS of the KINGS

"The most populous city of the dead in the world"

PART OF THE VALLEY SHOWING ENTRANCE TO ONE OF THE TOMBS

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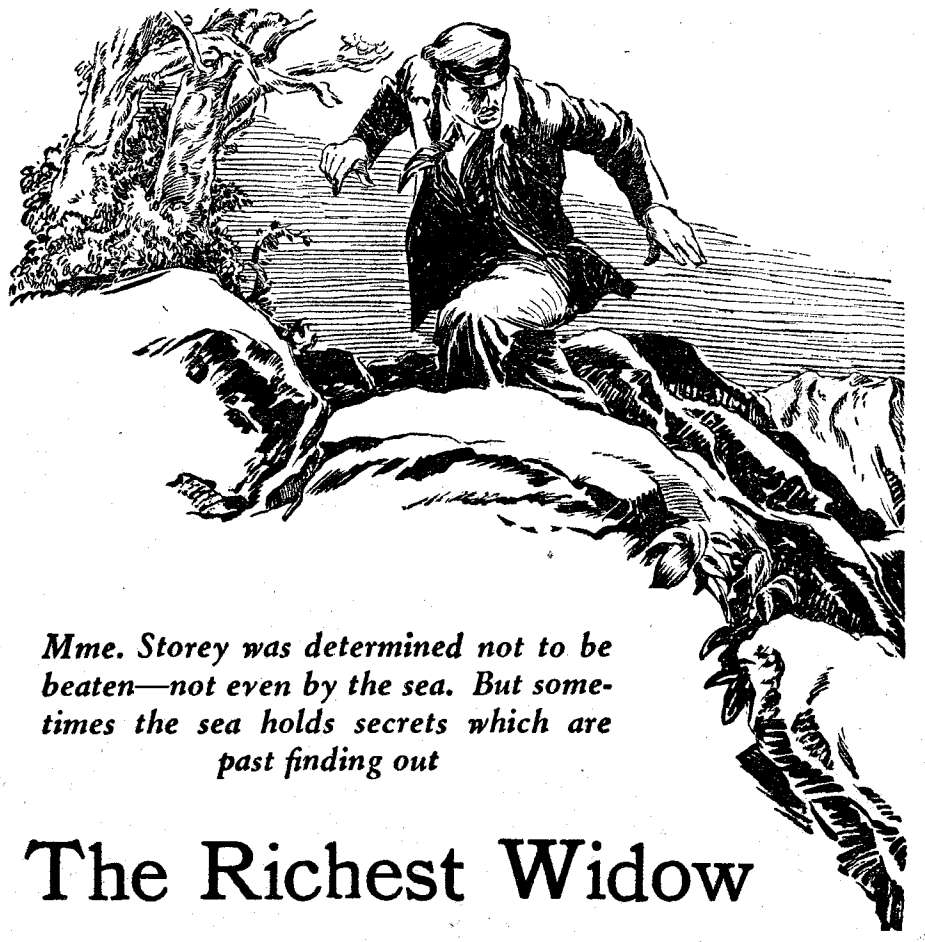

Mme. Storey was determined not to be beaten—not even by the sea. But sometimes the sea holds secrets which are past finding out

The Richest Widow

By HULBERT FOOTNER

Author of "Sink of Iniquity" "The Cold Trail," etc.

CHAPTER I.

SCHEMING VULTURES.

AFTER all the excitement and distress of the "Cold Trail" case, which turned out so badly for us, my employer, Madame Storey, decided to give herself a two months' vacation in Paris, and asked me to accompany her. At this time she had a notion of writing her memoirs, and expected to use me as an amanuensis. As it turned out, we were immediately caught in a fresh whirl of events in Paris, and no writing was done. However, that is another story.

She engaged accommodations on the *Baratoria,* her favorite ship. According to her custom we were booked under assumed names, but on this occasion it did her no good, for during the uproar of a mid-afternoon sailing a dozen people recognized her, and it soon spread all over the ship that the famous Mme. Storey was aboard.

Amongst the acquaintances she ran into was Mrs. Hibbert Lacy, the widow of the tin-plate magnate, a lady who had cut a wide swathe in the town since

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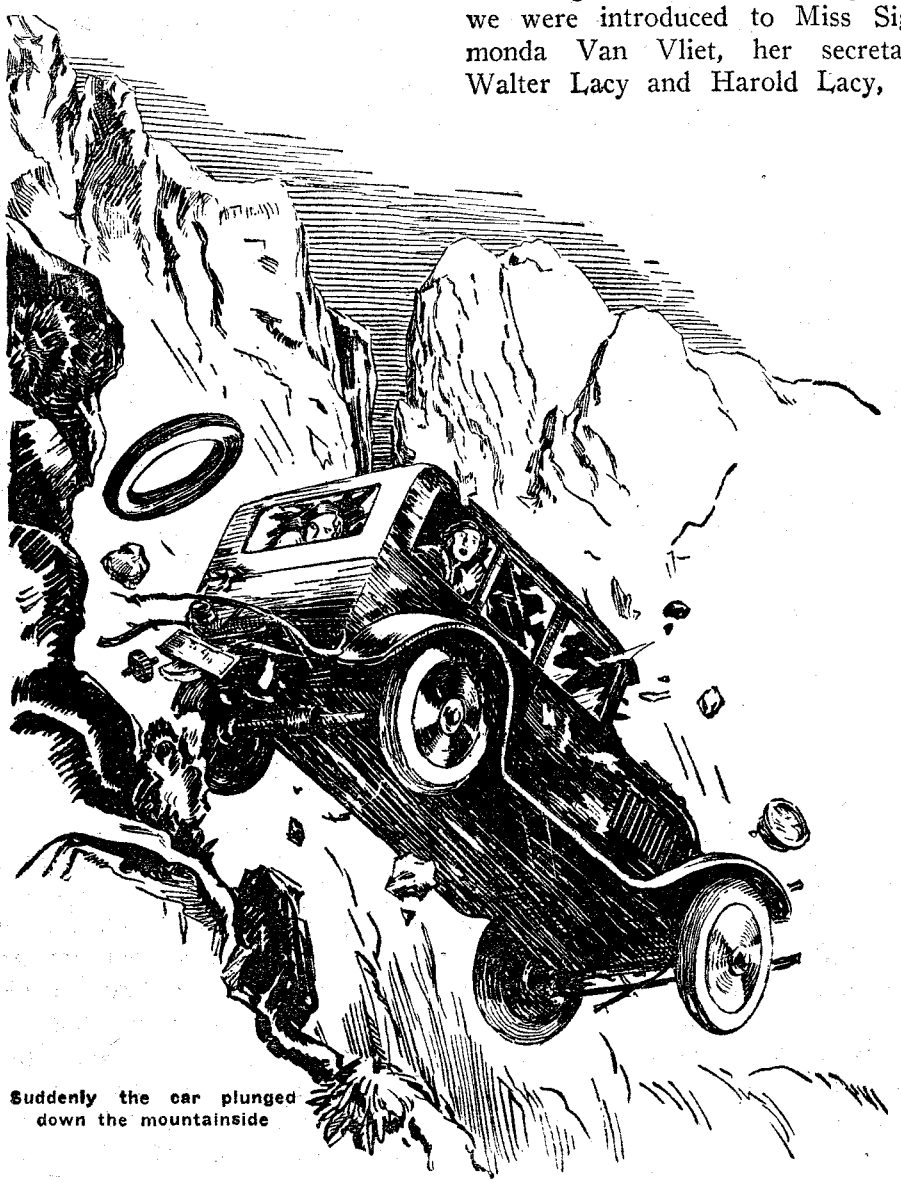
the death of her domineering husband. Mrs. Lacy was a slender little woman who had preserved her figure better than her face. All that the most expensive artistes in beauty could perform on her had been performed, but it only gave a sort of pickled effect.

Long Novelette



Suddenly the car plunged down the mountainside

However, she appeared happily unconscious of that, and was posing and coquetting all over the boat deck for the news photographers. She was an amusing sort of woman to meet socially; the consciousness of great wealth at least gave her the courage to be herself; but you never know what you may find when you scratch the social veneer.

Amongst her crowd of hangers-on, we were introduced to Miss Sigismonda Van Vliet, her secretary; Walter Lacy and Harold Lacy, her

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nephews, cousins to each other, and Ronald Mackworth, a young English actor who had made quite a hit in New York the preceding season in a play called, "Over the Fence Is Out." He could not act, but he had a smile revealing white teeth in a tanned face that no woman could resist. He was a good thirty years younger than Mrs. Lacy.

The richest widow had fairly screamed with delight at the sight of Mme. Storey. Such was her style. "We must see a lot of each other, Rosika!"

My employer and I shared the joke with straight faces. "We must indeed!" she said to Mrs. Lacy. "I had expected to bury myself in work on the way over, but I am always yours to command, Fanny."

"Not command, darling! It's the other way 'round. I only have money, but you have brains!"

"I'm glad somebody still thinks so," said Mme. Storey, thinking of our last case with a wry face.

"You must tell me the whole story, darling. It will be more exciting than a novel."

Mme. Storey, who never talks about her cases, merely smiled.

Mrs. Lacy asked us to dine with her party in their suite. She had something particular to tell Mme. Storey, she said. It is difficult to find an excuse on shipboard, and my employer accepted for us. As she said after we had left them:

"Anyhow it will be more amusing than eating in our cabin alone. If we went down to the saloon we'd be stared out of face."

Mme. Storey and I had communicating rooms forward on B deck. Nowhere on earth can one obtain such a sense of luxury as on a great liner at sea. As we sailed down the bay, and quiet settled over the ship, those charming little rooms filled with flowers, and the soft sea airs blowing through the open ports made me purr with a sense of well-being. I looked forward to six idle days of delight. Well, it didn't turn out just that way.

We put on our best for the dinner party. Mme. Storey, clad in one of the unadorned velvet gowns hanging from points over her shoulders that she affects, looked regal. Mrs. Lacy had the imperial suite on B deck amidships. You entered a beautiful sitting-room where the table was set, and passed out on a private veranda with sliding windows looking out over the sea. This place, filled with palms and flowering plants, was perfectly enchanting.

THE cocktails were put in busy circulation, and tongues unloosed. Nobody paid any particular attention to me, for which I was glad, as it left me free to use my eyes and ears on the others.

Amidst the happy smiles and lighthearted chatter I soon perceived a suggestion of strain—in fact of several strains. The impulsive Mrs. Lacy made no secret of the fact that she was completely infatuated with the young actor, and her two nephews, who were presumably her heirs, were terrified that something serious might come of it.

On the other hand, Miss Van Vliet, the social secretary, had fallen for Ronny Mackworth herself, and it was bitter to her to lose him to the old woman with money.

When we came to the round table, Mrs. Lacy, keeping Mme. Storey on one side of her, and Ronny on the other, let the rest of us seat ourselves as we would. Mackworth was on one side of me, one of the cousins on the other; then Miss Van Vliet (whom they called Sigi) next to her, then the other cousin,

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and so around to Mme. Storey. It was perfectly evident that Mrs. Lacy and Ronny were holding hands under the table. Everybody was aware of it.

Ronny Mackworth was handsome enough to have made any woman's heart ache; moreover, he appeared to be intelligent, good-humored and witty—not too conceited. His feelings were harder to explain. His manner towards her was perfect; simple, affectionate and humorous. He teased her and she adored him for it.

I could only suppose that the glamour of a hundred millions had really persuaded him that he was in love with her.

Such things do happen. It was well known that the money had been left to her outright.

I remember him saying as he held his glass of champagne up to the light and looked through it: "This is an improvement on my last voyage! I crossed to America third-class in an old Dutch hooker when I was looking for a job."

"Well, you've earned this, Ronny," said Mrs. Lacy fondly. "You need never experience such hardship again!"

Mme. Storey asked pleasantly, in order to make conversation:

"What are your plans for next season, Ronny?" Everybody called him Ronny at sight. That was the way he had with you.

Mrs. Lacy spoke up for him. "Oh, he isn't going to act any more. I don't think it's a good business for a man, do you?"

"It depends upon how talented an actor he is," said Mme. Storey smiling.

"Ronny has shown what he can do," said Mrs. Lacy.

"And now he's ready to retire," put in Sigi.

Mrs. Lacy ignored it. "The stage is beset with too many temptations," she said.

"Ronny will always look after number one," said Sigi with her diamond hard smile.

Mrs. Lacy's eyes snapped, and Mme. Storey intervened again.

"Well, if acting is out, what does he plan to do?"

"He should take plenty of time to look around first," said Mrs. Lacy.

"Hang it all, Fanny, can't you let a fellow answer for himself?" grumbled Ronny with his good-natured grin.

"Oh, I'm sorry, darling," she said, fawning on him. "A man must always be his own master."

"Well I don't know what I'm going to do," said Ronny, smiling around the table. "I want to make myself useful one way or another . . ."

"Why not take up weaving?" suggested Sigi.

Ronny took it with perfect good humor. "Ah, Sigi, you're always getting at me! I can't help it if I'm not as bright as you are!"

Mrs. Lacy was furious at the girl. "He doesn't have to work at anything if it doesn't suit him," she said.

That was pretty direct, and something like consternation descended on the other side of the table. Sigi bit her lip and lowered her head, while the two Lacys turned greenish.

"If I want to spend my money on Ronny who's to prevent me?" Mrs. Lacy went on. "It's my money. Look at him! Isn't he worth it?"

"For Heaven's sake, Fanny," Ronny protested, laughing. "It's not a question of money, I hope."

"Of course it isn't. But just the same it's a great satisfaction to me to fill your pockets and tell you to go and spend it . . . It's better yours than some others I could mention." She

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glanced at the ghastly young men across the table.

BOTH these young men had been given jobs in the tin-plate organization, and had been dropped through sheer incapacity. They were in receipt of large allowances from the Lacy estate, but all the most expensive schools, servants and clothes could not endow them with grace or style.

Harold, the elder, looked like a dressed-up booby, while Wesley's long nose with a quivering tip made him look ratlike. Such young men would have hated the handsome, graceful Ronny anyhow, but when Ronny, in addition, threatened their inheritance, their hatred must have mounted almost to the point of insanity. Neither of them said anything, but their eyes burned when they looked at him.

"You remember my saying that I had something to tell you, Rosika," Mrs. Lacy went on. "Well, this is it. Ronny and I are married."

"Married!" We all exclaimed in tones of stupefaction.

Mrs. Lacy was charmed with the sensation she had created. "Married, sure enough," she said smiling. "All Ronny's bags have been carried into my room yonder."

A ghastly silence fell on us. I couldn't bear to look at the three whose hopes had been so cruelly destroyed. The stewards went around the table filling the champagne glasses, and retired. Something had to be said. Mme. Storey raised her glass.

"To the newlyweds!"

They all drank to it. The wine must nearly have strangled them. Sigi Van Vliet was livid under her make up. These hard, self-controlled women have a terrible capacity for emotion. I pitied her. She kept her head up.

"When did it happen?" she asked, smiling.

"Three hours before the ship sailed," said Mrs. Lacy. "We went down to the Municipal Building and were married by an alderman. I arranged it so that the news would not be released until after we cast off. It will be all over town now."

Silence threatened us again. Mme. Storey averted it by saying: "You're a deep one, Fanny! Fancy exploding a mine under us like this!"

"It was the only thing to do," said Mrs. Lacy. "Think of the disgusting publicity if the news had got out before we sailed!"

Harold Lacy, who had a face like a large suet pudding with some trifling irregularity in its surface, and two raisins sticking out, stammered: "I'm sure I hope you'll be happy, Aunt Fanny."

"How often have I told you not to call me that," she said pettishly. "Coming from a man of your age to me it's ridiculous. Drop the aunt, please, or if you like call me Mrs. Mackworth."

"Sorry," he mumbled.

Rage made his cousin Wesley look meaner and more ratlike than ever. "Congratulations," he drawled.

MRS. LACY didn't like the sound of it, and undertook to crack her whip over them. "Of course my marriage will make a considerable difference in the family situation," she said, smiling unpleasantly. "But I want you and Harold to know that I shall continue to pay you your allowances. And I shall leave you enough to keep you. You'd be out of luck if you were dependent on your own resources. Always provided, of course, that you bear yourselves towards me in a friendly

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manner. I'm not obliged to leave you anything."

"It was understood . . ." Wesley began, drawing his lips back over his teeth.

"By whom?" demanded Mrs. Lacy.

"After all, Harold and I are Lacys."

"What of it? Did you and Harold help to make the Lacy fortune? Or did your fathers before you? No! They were both hangers-on of my husband until they died . . ."

Mme. Storey interrupted this tirade by laying a hand on Mrs. Lacy's arm. "This is a purely family matter," she murmured. "Bella and I will retire."

Mrs. Lacy gripped her arm. "I won't have it," she said. "Let the men go if they can't mend their manners."

Harold and Wesley arose, bowed in a hangdog fashion and went out. Wesley's narrowed shoulders were drawn up and bent with rage.

In order to make clear what happened later I must say a word about the arrangement of the suite. On the left of the sitting-room as you faced the veranda was a large bedroom which the two young men shared.

On the right was a similar room which was to be the bridal chamber. A second door on the right gave on a passage leading to Sigi's cabin. In this passage were several doors leading to the inside cabins occupied by the servants of the party.

Well, we were left sitting at the table with Sigi Van Vliet. I noticed that she had emptied her wine glass several times and had filled it without waiting for a servant. She had never ceased smiling at Ronny in her diamond-hard fashion. He avoided her eye. I suppose that Sigi perceived that her goose was cooked with Mrs. Lacy. At any rate she became quite reckless.

"I'm waiting to hear the bridegroom make a speech," she said in a voice like breaking icicles. "It's customary, isn't it? All about the raptures and roses of young love. And the blisses of the wedded state . . ."

Mrs. Lacy sprang up trembling with rage. "Silence, miss! . . . Leave the room!"

Sigi extended her tall figure, and moved from the table. "With pleasure," she drawled.

"Tomorrow morning you can move to another part of the ship!" cried Mrs. Lacy. "And you can return to New York on this ship, or go to the devil for all I care! Don't think that I can't see through you, miss! I saw through you from the beginning! But you were useful to me. Now I'm through with you!"

"Well, that's nice to hear, too," said Sigi.

"Oh, is it? Is it? Well maybe this won't be so nice! You were useful to me and I put you down in my will for a good round sum. Well you'll never get that now. Not a cent! Not a cent!"

"Saves me the trouble of refusing it," said Sigi, quietly closing the door after her.

Mrs. Lacy dropped back in her chair fairly weeping with rage. Sigi had deprived her of the last word.

"Bella and I must go," said Mme. Storey.

Mrs. Lacy literally held her down. "No! No! No! They've gone now. We can be happy again . . . I'm glad you were here, Rosika. You have seen what I have to put up with. No one would believe it who hadn't seen it. And, after all I have done for them, the miserable ingrates!"

MY employer was becoming just a shade impatient. "Why on earth did you bring them with you on your honeymoon?" she asked.

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"Well," said Mrs. Lacy spitefully, "in the case of Harold and Wesley, I thought they needed a lesson. I'm so sick of the way they come around me, trying to pry into my affairs under the pretense of hypocritical affection. Wesley is the worst. He set out to master me. It would make you die laughing. I didn't ask them to come on this trip. When I told them I was going to England they said they would come along too, to look after me. And I thought: Very well, my lads! If you insist on it, let it be on your own heads!"

"But Sigi Van Vliet . . . you must have known . . ."

"Certainly I knew! The way she ran after Ronny was perfectly disgusting. I wanted to give her a lesson, too. I thought it would pay her off to bring her along. I have always hated that girl and her sneery ways. Held herself so high! I put up with it because she was useful to me. Now I don't need her any longer."

Mme. Storey and I glanced at each other without expression. What a world! we were both thinking.

Ronny applied himself to soothing his ruffled bride. He flung an arm around her, and she dropped her head comfortably on his shoulder. "There, darling!" he murmured. "Forget about them all! They have nothing to do with you and me. I'm glad things came to a show-down with Sigi. Now we won't have to have her around during the rest of the voyage. I wish we could shift the others, too."

"We shall!" said Mrs. Lacy—I mean Mrs. Mackworth—tearfully.

"Good!" said Ronny. "Then we can be quite alone together. That's what I want—always!"

She raised up, and took his face between her two jeweled hands. "Oh, Ronny, you're such a dear!" she whispered. "You can always cheer me up. Oh, Ronny, I love you to distraction!"

"That's right!" he said, grinning boyishly. "That's what a wife ought to do!"

Mme. Storey and I took our leave.

CHAPTER II.

DOUBLE MURDER?

WE did not turn in right away, but went for a stroll on deck. We said very little about what had happened. It wasn't necessary because we were in agreement about it. As Mme. Storey put it:

"Too much money makes monkeys of people."

"I suppose it's having power without any responsibility," I said.

"Exactly. I'm thankful I've had to work hard for what I've got."

We walked aft where we could get out from under the roof and see the sky. It was an enchanting mild night, the sea heaving slowly like some vast creature with a troubled breast. All the stars were hanging out their little lamps. Mme Storey gazing up at them, murmured:

"What must they think of us foolish mortals!"

Later, in passing the smoking room we saw Ronny Mackworth drinking at the bar with some men. He saw us and presently overtook us on the promenade. He seemed quite untroubled. We stopped and leaned on the rail.

"I see you had the same desire," he said. "A little air. Fanny is preparing to go to bed."

A complicated business with her, I thought, but I didn't say it.

He appeared to feel that some apology was necessary for her. "She's

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had a hard day," he said deprecatingly. "She got all roiled up."

Mme. Storey had no intention of allowing herself to be drawn into a further discussion of their affairs. "Naturally," she said pleasantly. "Do you know, I think our Orion is a much finer constellation than the famous Southern Cross."

After a few minutes of idle talk he bade us good night and disappeared below.

We continued to stroll about the deck. After a few minutes we saw Ronny coming towards us again. He seemed a little perturbed.

"Have you seen Fanny?" he asked.

"No."

"When I left her she said she was going to bed, but when I went back she wasn't there. She hadn't undressed."

"I suppose she wanted a little exercise, too," suggested Mme. Storey.

"Very likely. But I don't see her anywhere."

After having looked in the various public rooms he passed us again. "Good-night," he said. "This is final. Fanny must have gone to call on some of her friends. I'll wait for her below."

We soon followed him.

In the morning we lay late and enjoyed the rare luxury (for me) of having breakfast in bed. The door was open between our two rooms and we could talk back and forth. Later we dressed and went on deck. It was a delicious sunny morning with a calm sea, and the entire passenger list was lined up on the promenade in deck chairs. We walked.

We saw Sigi Van Vliet, who had already gathered a new circle of friends about her, and was keeping them laughing. A clever and attractive girl, but so hard I couldn't conceive of any man falling in love with her. I suppose that was why she was still hanging from the bough. She greeted us in a friendly fashion, even eagerly.

Passing the veranda café we also saw Harold and Wesley Lacy. They appeared to be quarreling in low voices. They looked the other way when they saw us.

We were beginning to think about lunch with pleased anticipation when a boy in uniform offered Mme. Storey a note. "Captain Coulson's compliments, madame, and would you please send an answer by word of mouth."

She read the note and said: "How nice! The captain asks us to lunch with him in his cabin." she said to the boy: "Madame Storey's compliments to Captain Coulson, and she and Miss Brickley will be delighted to lunch with him."

AFTER having powdered our noses, we proceeded up from deck to deck to the altitude of the bridge where the Commander was waiting for us, a grizzled British seaman, every inch of him. His capacious quarters delighted me even more than the Imperial suite because it was so workmanlike. Lunch was set for three in his sitting-room, but the captain was obviously worried. When we were left alone he said at once:

"I have a confession to make to you. I am taking advantage of our old acquaintanceship . . ."

"Say friendship," corrected Mme. Storey.

"I hardly dared without some encouragement . . . Our friendship then. Lunch was only an excuse. I have need to consult with you, and I thought we had better meet here where no one would know of it. It's a serious matter."

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Mme. Storey knew that he was no alarmist. "What's the matter?" she asked quietly.

"It has been reported to me that the rich Mrs. Lacy—or, as I should now call her, Mrs. Mackworth, and her young husband have disappeared from the ship."

Mme. Storey and I sat down very suddenly. "Good Heavens!" she murmured aghast. "Both of them!"

"Both of them. It is not known yet. I gave orders that the matter was to be kept secret until I had talked with you."

"How long have you known this, Captain?"

"About half an hour. It appears that Mrs. Mackworth's maid, hearing nothing from her mistress or no sound from the room, became alarmed about noon and knocked on the door. Receiving no answer, she tried the handle. It was unlocked. She found the room empty.

"An odd thing is that the young man had undressed. His evening clothes were lying there. But the lady had not. Her night things were waiting for her. Neither bed had been occupied. She sent a steward to inform me. I am having the ship searched from stem to stern."

"Naturally," said Mme. Storey. "But of course nothing will come of it. There is no earthly reason why they should go and hide themselves. Particularly if the young man was in his pyjamas."

The captain sat down then. He pulled out an enormous white handkerchief and mopped his honest, sweating face. "Good God!" he muttered. "Then you think . . . you think they may have been done away with!"

"There is every reason to think so," said Mme. Storey gravely.

"Oh, this is terrible, madame! Think of the hideous publicity! It will ruin my ship!"

Mme. Storey tersely described the situation that the dinner party revealed. "You see, it has all the potentialities of murder," she said. "Unluckily one can never foresee murder."

"These people," he said excitedly, "the secretary, the two nephews, they must be questioned immediately." He reached for a bell.

Mme. Storey held up her hand. "Wait, Captain! Let me examine the suite first, and question the lady's maid."

"Right!" he said. "I rely on you absolutely. This sort of thing . . ." he waved his hands helplessly. "But if it had to happen, how lucky I am to have you at my side!"

"Let me go down to the Imperial suite ahead of you," said Mme. Storey. "It will attract less attention."

"But your lunch," he objected.

"Never mind lunch."

In the corridor outside the suite de luxe we came upon a group of stewards and stewardesses gossiping with scared faces. "Please go about your work," said Mme. Storey, a little sharply. "You are to say nothing, and to act as if nothing had happened. Captain's orders." They separated.

IN the pretty sitting-room we found a man-servant and a maid servant hanging about not knowing what to do. The woman was weeping quietly. Mme. Storey addressed herself to her.

"You know who I am?"

"Oh, yes, madame."

"The Captain has asked me to help him investigate this matter. He will be here directly." (Captain Coulson came in while Mme. Storey was questioning the woman.) "What is your name?"

"Stickney, madame."

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"That sounds so unfriendly," said Mme. Storey. "Your first name?"

The woman was middle-aged, and looked a good, faithful soul. She seemed to feel that she had found a friend in Mme. Storey and got a better grip on herself. "Kate, ma'am," she said.

"Sit down and take it easy," said Mme. Storey. "When did you last see your mistress and Mr. Mackworth?"

Mme. Storey paced up and down the room, smoking. Captain Coulson stood with his back to the windows, watching and listening. He rarely interfered. He was like the judge at this inquiry, Mme. Storey the advocate—and I the clerk.

"It was about eleven o'clock, madame," said Kate. "Soon after the guests had gone. Mrs. Mackworth called me into her bedroom and said . . ."

"One moment. Was Mr. Mackworth with her?"

"Yes, ma'am. My mistress was sitting at her dressing table taking off her jewels . . ."

"Are the jewels there?"

"Yes, ma'am. Nothing is missing."

"Go on."

"Mr. Mackworth was standing behind her looking at her in the mirror. They was laughing hearty at each other. Very loving, ma'am."

"What did she say to you?"

"She said she wouldn't want me to help her undress, and I could go to bed. So I left them."

"Where is your room?"

Kate pointed. "First door on the right of the little corridor."

"Is there a door from Mrs. Mackworth's room to that corridor?"

"No ma'am. I had to come around through this room to get to her."

"Did you hear anything after you went to bed?"

"Yes, ma'am. In a little while Mr. Mackworth went out."

"How do you know it was Mr. Mackworth?"

"Because I heard him say to her as he crossed this room: "I'll give you half an hour, darling."

"That would be when we first saw him on deck," put in Mme. Storey. "Did you hear anything else?"

"Yes, ma'am. In a little while I heard him come back again. He shot the bolt on the door when he came in."

"But he went out again. We met him on deck a second time."

"Well, he must have bolted the door again when he come in. I was the first up this morning. The door was still bolted."

"How about the rooms of the suite? Were any of them locked?"

"No, ma'am; there were no keys. When we first come aboard the steward offered to supply keys if wanted, but there didn't seem to be any call for them."

MME. STOREY looked at Captain Coulson. "That narrows it down," she remarked.

He nodded, relieved to discover that no member of his ship's company was involved.

"Did you hear anything else?" she asked Kate.

"No, ma'am. I must have fallen asleep then."

"Are you sure you didn't sleep between the time he went out and the time he came in again?"

"Yes, ma'am. I was putting my things in order then."

"Could not Mrs. Mackworth have gone out without your hearing her?"

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"Seems like I must have heard the doors open and close, ma'am."

"Are you a heavy sleeper, Kate?"

"No, ma'am. The least little thing wakens me. I woke several times during the night."

"And you heard no cry, no struggle, no fall?"

"Nothing whatever, ma'am."

"Well, let's come to this morning."

"I was up at eight, ma'am," said Kate: "but there wasn't anything for me to do until my mistress called me. I went out on the veranda and looked at the sea. I had my breakfast sent up from the servants dining room and ate it in my cabin."

"Did you see Miss Van Vliet?"

"Yes, ma'am. I helped her pack her things."

"How did she look?"

"The same as usual, ma'am. Always the lady, Miss Van Vliet."

"Did she say why she was moving?"

"Just made a joke of it, like. Didn't want to hamper the newly-weds. She went to see the purser about another room, and moved out at ten o'clock."

"Is there a door from her cabin to the corridor?"

"Yes, ma'am. But as the suite was sold as a whole, that door was locked and the key taken away. Miss Van Vliet had to come out this way. The same with Mr. Harold and Mr. Wesley Lacy. They came out this way when they moved."

"Did they say anything to you?"

"No, ma'am. It was not their custom to take any notice of me!"

"Did Miss Van Vliet or the Lacys try to see Mrs. Mackworth before they left?"

"No, ma'am. All moved very quiet so as not to arouse her."

Mme. Storey smiled grimly, and turned to Clarkson, the elegant young gentleman's gentleman who had waited upon Ronny.

From him she learned next to nothing. He had been engaged only three days before sailing. Upon coming aboard the *Baratoria* Ronny had been assigned to cabin B92. Clarkson had helped him to dress for dinner early, and had then superintended the moving of his belongings to Mrs. Lacy's suite. At this hour the members of Mrs. Lacy's party were dressing for dinner and nobody was aware of the move.

Mr. Mackworth had then given him the evening off, and he had gone over to the tourist class where there was a dance. He had returned about eleven, had passed a few words with Mrs. Pinckney and went to bed. His cabin was next to Mrs. Pinckney's. He had heard no unusual sounds during the night. He confessed that he was a heavy sleeper.

MME. STOREY opened the door into the bedroom. "Kate," she asked, "has anything in here been changed since you first opened the door?"

"Absolutely not, ma'am. Nobody has been in there but me."

I followed Mme. Storey in with my notebook. Captain Coulson remained standing in the doorway. My employer said to him:

"I trust you appreciate what a hopeless task you have put up to me, Captain. There is the sea ready to receive any incriminating evidence, and to hide it forever."

"Just the same I am confident that you will solve it anyhow," he said doggedly.

It was a charming room lighted by two large brass-rimmed portholes

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which stood wide open. Everything was in pairs; twin beds; twin dressing-tables—even twin bathrooms. The one for the lady was done in pink enamel with gold fittings; the man's in black and silver. Across the foot of the beds stretched a chaise-longue.

Beside it on the rug lay a newspaper, some scattered ashes and a cigarette butt which had burned a hole in the rug before going out.

The inference was inescapable that Ronny had lain down to wait for his wife and had fallen asleep. What had happened to him then? And where was she while he waited for her? On a chair near his bed lay his evening clothes neatly folded. The clothes seemed to bring the tragedy horribly near. I shivered.

Meanwhile Mme. Storey, with the magnifying glass that she always carries in her handbag, was examining the room and the two bathrooms, foot by foot. She called out to Kate to ask if she had noticed how many towels there had been in the bathrooms originally.

"Four hand towels and two bath towels in each room," the maid answered. "I noticed particularly."

"Six of the hand towels are missing," said Mme. Storey grimly.

She pointed to a damp spot in the rug near Mrs. Mackworth's dressing-table. "Blood was spilled here," she said. "The murderer washed out the spot, but had no means of drying it quickly."

"Blood!" muttered Captain Coulson scowling.

"He couldn't have shot them nor poisoned them; nor could he have strangled them without a noisy struggle. He must have used a knife."

The portholes with their brass rims, and the strong hooks that were used to support them when they were open, occupied her attention for a while. "He lowered one or both bodies into the sea on a rope," she said finally. "That was to avoid causing a splash that might have attracted attention on deck. The ropes followed the bodies into the sea."

"How do you know he used ropes?" asked the Captain.

She beckoned to him to approach. With the magnifying glass she showed both of us the fuzz that had collected on the edge of the brass rim where the rope had chafed against it.

"Both bodies were disposed of in that fashion," she said after further study. "The first ones he lowered direct, paying out the rope hand over hand. The rope chafed against the edge of the brass rim and some fuzz collected there. That is hempen fuzz. He found that method too difficult and the second time he threw the rope over the hook above the window to take part of the strain off his arms. The fuzz clinging to the hook is cotton fuzz. That's how I know there were two separate operations."

"My God!" murmured Captain Coulson.

SHE pointed to a slight smear of blood on one of the brass rims.

"They always overlook something," she remarked. She stuck her head out of the porthole, and when she drew it in, invited us to take a look. On the black-painted side of the vessel some feet below the porthole was a tell-tale reddish swipe.

"First the woman was lowered while her husband was up on deck," murmured Captain Coulson. "Then the man after he had returned below."

"So it appears," said Mme. Storey.

"But how could he get one and an-

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other without any outcry being raised?"

"The man may have been asleep," I suggested.

"Maybe. But the woman wasn't asleep. And if she was sitting there in front of her mirror, she could see anybody who might try to steal up behind her."

"But we're satisfied, aren't we, that it was somebody in the suite, that is to say, somebody she knew?" suggested Mme. Storey. "She wouldn't take any alarm at first sight."

"Of course!"

"Bella," said my employer, "find Miss Van Vliet and bring her here—if possible without letting her know what she's wanted for."

"Good God!" cried Captain Coulson with a glance of horror. "Surely no woman could have done this!"

"Like all sailors you are chivalrous," said Mme. Storey with a grim smile. "My experience suggests that women can do anything that men can."

She suddenly opened her hand and showed us a quaint little bow of checked black and white taffeta. "Found it under Mrs. Mackworth's dressing-table," she said.

CHAPTER III.

SECRET OF THE SEA.

THE contrast of the gay scene on deck with the grim situation I had left below made a painful impression on me. It seemed to me incredible that people could strut around the promenade in their best clothes, or loll in deck chairs chatting, laughing, flirting, without a care on their minds, while such dreadful things were happening. Perfectly unreasonable of me, of course.

I ran into Sigi Van Vliet parading briskly with two cavaliers. She had already changed her dress since I had seen her before, and was now wearing a stunning yellow sports ensemble that went admirably with her dark hair and eyes. She appeared to be the gayest amongst the gay, and it made my heart harden against her. I paused, and, seeing by my face that I wanted to speak with her, she came to me.

"Mme. Storey would like to see you," I said. "Will you come below?"

"Surely!" she said with an open glance. "I feel honored." She sent the two young men on their way.

Sigi knew that Mme. Storey's cabins lay forward of the Imperial suite, and it seemed natural to her when we turned into that corridor. But her eyebrows went up when I paused in front of the suite.

"In here?" she asked.

I nodded. A very strange expression came over her face. However, she instantly grasped the handle of the door and went in. She was still more astonished when she saw the captain there. Her eyes darted around the room.

"Where's Mrs. Lacy?" she demanded breathlessly. She would never refer to that lady by her newly-married name.

"She's missing," said Mme. Storey gravely.

Sigi fell back a step, gasping. "Missing? . . . Missing? . . . What do you mean?"

Mme. Storey spread out her hands. Suddenly with a cry, Sigi ran to the door of the veranda, searched it with her frantic eyes, then to the bedroom searching.

"Ronny! Ronny!" she cried sharply. "Where is Ronny?"

"He's gone too," said Mme. Storey.

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Sigi came to a dead stop, pressing her clenched hands hard into her cheeks. Her eyes were daft; her words scarcely intelligible. "What has happened? I knew . . . something like this! It was too dreadful a thing to do . . . wicked!"

"Calm yourself," said Mme. Storey in a friendly way. "This is not like you."

"Like me?" the girl flashed on her. "What do you know about me? You have seen only my dress uniform."

"Help us to establish what has happened to Mrs. Mackworth," urged my employer.

"I care nothing about her," retorted the girl. "Serves her right. She asked for it, didn't she? You heard her! . . ." Sigi's voice broke. "Oh, Ronny! Ronny! Ronny! In the sea!" In her distracted state she seemed about to rush out on the veranda and cast herself over. Captain Coulson stepped in front of the door.

The girl's surprise and consternation appeared to be so overwhelming that the honest sailor exculpated her on the spot, but Mme. Storey and I reserved judgment yet awhile. We had been fooled before by good acting under similar circumstances.

"When did you last see Mrs. Mackworth?" Mme. Storey asked quietly.

The direct question pulled the girl up all standing. She drew a mask over her tormented face. She took her time about answering.

"Why, you were present," she said quietly enough. "You heard her dismiss me."

"Didn't you see her after that?"

"Certainly not! What for? To listen to more insults?"

"Don't lie to me," said Mme. Storey persuasively. "I wish to be your friend."

"I don't understand you," said Sigi haughtily.

"Well, let's get at it another way. When were you last in that bedroom?"

"I never was in that bedroom," said Sigi instantly. "When we came aboard yesterday we went to our own rooms. I never had any occasion to go into Mrs. Lacy's bedroom. I wasn't her servant."

Mme. Storey produced the little black and white bow from her hand bag. "Then how did this get in here?"

SIGI looked at it in horror, and ran her hands through her hair. She was unable to speak.

"Are you going to tell me that this did not come off the dress you wore last night?" Mme. Storey quietly persisted. "Do you want me to send Bella to fetch the dress?"

Sigi raised her shoulders, spread out her hands and let them fall. "You have me," she said apathetically. "I was a fool to lie. I was in there last night. But I assure you Mrs. Lacy was very much alive when I left her. Ronny, too. He was with her."

"Just when was this?" asked Mme. Storey.

"Immediately after you and Miss Brickley left. In fact I waited for you to go. I didn't want you to see me humiliated further."

"What did you go back for?"

"Well, it had to do with a valuable set of antique jewelry; a gold and turquoise necklace, brooch, pair of earrings and pair of bracelets. A cousin of mine had asked me to try to sell it to Mrs. Lacy for her. My cousins are poor. Mrs. Lacy said she would buy it, but she hadn't paid me for it.

"Rich as she was, she wasn't always prompt in paying her debts. After she dismissed me so summarily, it occurred

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to me that I must get either the money or the jewelry before I left the suite, as she certainly would never allow me to approach her again."

"I see. What happened while you were in her room?"

"Mrs. Lacy brought out the jewelry. Just to torment me she tried to beat me down on the price that had already been agreed on. I lost my temper and snatched up the box. It was then that she caught at me, and I suppose the little bow come off in her hand. I never missed it. I succeeded in getting out of the room with my box intact."

"Have you any proof that the scene took place in this manner?" asked Mme. Storey.

A puzzled look came into Sigi's face. "Ronny was there," she said.

"He can't confirm your story now."

"I have the jewelry in my cabin. I can show it to you."

"That would hardly be proof, would it?"

Sigi was at a loss. Mme. Storey turned to the maid. "Kate, can you confirm the fact that Mrs. Mackworth had such a set of jewelry in her possession for a time?"

"I never saw it, ma'am." The woman's honesty compelled her to add: "But that's no proof she didn't have it. I didn't see all her things."

A look of relief broke in Sigi's harassed face. "Harold Lacy knew the circumstances," she said. "He saw the jewels in his aunt's possession. He tried to persuade her not to buy them. He hated her to spend money."

"Very well, we'll ask him," said Mme. Storey. "What did you do after you got the jewels back?"

"Returned to my room and stayed there until morning."

"You heard nothing?"

"Nothing. The two bathrooms were between my cabin and Mrs. Lacy's. There were three closed doors between us."

"I SUGGEST," said Mme. Storey, "that you waited until Ronny had left his wife before you went in to her."

"That's not so," said Sigi. "It happened exactly as I have told you . . . Heavens, do you think that *I* made away with her?" she burst out.

"I am not accusing you," said Mme. Storey mildly. "But you see, you might have had a powerful motive."

"What was that?"

"Mrs. Mackworth told you in my hearing that she intended to cancel the substantial legacy she had put down for you."

"I never gave it a thought," said Sigi with curling lips.

While Mme. Storey was questioning the girl there was a knock at the door, and upon being bidden to enter, Harold Lacy showed his anxious, clay-colored face. He came in looking blankly from Mme. Storey to Captain Coulson, to Sigi. Before he could speak Wes Lacy followed at his heels. Harold turned on him.

"What are you following me about for?" he snarled.

"To find out what you are up to, you sneak!" retorted Wes.

Then both of them, looking around, asked simultaneously: "Where's Mrs. Lacy?"

When Mme. Storey told them succinctly what the situation was, astonishment, whether real or assumed, rendered them both dumb. But whereas Harold looked frightened, Wes smiled in a mean way.

"Is it good news to you?" Mme. Storey asked him dryly.

"No!" he snarled, recoiling.

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"Then why do you smile?"

"It is just my way," he answered, smiling still.

"Well, we are very glad you have both come," said Mme. Storey dryly. "We look to you to help us clear up this matter. Please answer a few questions. First you, Mr. Harold, in relation to a set of antique gold and turquoise jewelry that had been offered to Mrs. Lacy and was in her possession up to last night. I have been informed that you had seen this jewelry, and had advised her not to purchase it. Is that true?"

Harold hesitated in an agony of indecision before answering, looking around from face to face and moistening his pale lips.

"Can't you answer a plain question?" barked the captain.

"I know nothing about such a set of jewelry," said Harold. "Certainly it was never shown me."

Sigi said nothing, but only smiled scornfully. That smile said: You *would* say that! and from that moment I believed in her innocence. Because it seemed obvious to me that the man was lying. My employer thought so too.

"Thank you," she said dryly. "Next we are anxious to learn what was the status of you and your cousin in respect to the Lacy fortune. You started to say last night that it was understood, when Mrs. Lacy shut you off. What was understood?"

HAROLD answered promptly now. "That my cousin and I were to share it equally upon her death. It was my uncle's wish."

"Had she made a will to that effect?"

"Yes."

"Have you seen the will?"

"Yes."

"So far as you know it's the last will she made?"

"Yes."

"You fool; you're sending yourself to the chair!" muttered Wes.

"Silence!" shouted Captain Coulson.

"Did you know that your aunt had married Mr. Mackworth before she told you last night in this room?"

"No."

"Had you a suspicion that he was courting her or, shall we say, that she was courting him?"

"No."

"Then her announcement was a complete surprise?"

"Absolutely!" Wes answered at once. Harold, however, hesitated, looking around from face to face in an agony, trying to read what had taken place before he came in. Finally he mumbled: "It was a complete surprise to me."

"Thank you very much," said Mme. Storey ironically. "Now we're getting somewhere."

I couldn't see it, but I don't pretend to follow all her subtleties.

Still addressing herself to Harold, Mme. Storey went on: "Please tell us what happened after you and Mr. Wes retired to your room last night."

Harold looked at her stupidly. "Nothing."

Mme. Storey, taking note of their hateful suspicious glances at each other, said at a venture: "You quarreled."

Harold, startled, said: "No!"

Wes laughed. "Certainly we quarreled," he burst out. "Why lie about it? I had cause enough to quarrel with him, God knows! It was all his fault that she cast us off. He wouldn't leave her alone; always hanging around her and plaguing her and trying to pry into her affairs! She always considered us

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together, though she had no reason to. We had nothing in common. I always despised him for a fool, but I had to pretend to stick to him because our interests were identical. Well, if she's gone there's no further need for that. I'll go my own way now."

Captain Coulson stared incredulously at this naïve confession of meanness. Mme. Storey made no attempt to stop Wes' outburst. It was all grist to her mill.

Harold turned on Wes then. "Oh, why don't you tell them what *you* did when we went into that room. You stood with your ear at the crack of the door listening to everything that was said in here!"

"Sure, I did," said Wes, brazening it out. "It was a natural thing to do. I had a big stake in what was going on."

"Perfectly natural," agreed Mme. Storey. "So you heard Mrs. Lacy dismiss Sigi; you heard Miss Brickley and I leave; you heard Sigi return to Mrs. Lacy's room, and perhaps you heard a bit of the quarrel over the jewelry that ensued."

"Sure, I heard all that," said Wes coolly.

"Then you heard Ronny go out?"

"We both heard that," said Wes. "Because he spoke to his wife as he crossed this room. Said he'd be back in half an hour."

"Then what happened?" asked Mme. Storey softly.

WES grinned hatefully and looked at Harold. "Ask him," he said.

"Nothing happened," stammered Harold.

Wes waited, grinning still, as if he wanted to enjoy the full flavor of the joke before sharing it. "You're a fool if you expect me to lie for you," he said to Harold. "It's every man for himself now." He looked at Mme. Storey. "Harold left me," he said.

"So he left you," said Mme. Storey. "Where did he go?"

"You can search me."

"He's lying," mumbled Harold. "He watched from the bedroom door to see where I went. He saw me cross this room and go out the door into the corridor."

"That's not so," said Wes. "I didn't care where he went. He went out of our room, closing the door after him, and I heard nothing more."

"When did he come back?"

"He never came back. I didn't see him again until this morning. Still in his dinner clothes at nine in the morning."

"You went over to your aunt's room," Mme. Storey suggested to Harold.

"No!" he cried, sweating and shaking. "I told you I left the suite. I only wanted to get away from *him,* the liar. Always at me! Always at me! Blamed me for everything that happened. I couldn't sleep in the same room with him. So I got out."

"Wait a minute!" said Mme. Storey. "Kate's room is just on the other side of the wall. She was awake. She heard Ronny Mackworth go out, and half an hour later she heard him come in again. She didn't hear you go out."

"That was because I went softly," stammered Harold. "I tiptoed out, and closed the door after me without making a sound. I didn't want to attract my aunt's attention."

Captain Coulson suddenly burst out: "Ah! I have no patience with this whining wretch! You knew that your aunt was alone in her room! You knew that you had half an hour before her husband would return! You knew that

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she was about to make a new will and you would have to act quickly! You went over there and made certain that no more wills would be written.

"You then reflected that her husband was bound to inherit a large share of her wealth anyhow. You hid yourself and waited for him. You waited until he fell asleep. You stabbed him and disposed of his body, like his wife before him, out of the porthole! It is perfectly clear!"

"No! No!" whined Harold. "I never knew they were gone until I came into this room just now." Suddenly he seemed to pluck up a little spirit. "If they're gone you can't prove anything anyhow. You can't prove a murder without producing the body!"

Captain Coulson stepped forward, and for a moment I thought he was going to strike the man down. "So that's the line you take!" he cried furiously. "That's almost as good as a confession! I'll make it my business to see that you confess! We'll hang you with your own words!"

"You can't!" insisted Harold. "Because I didn't do it!"

Mme. Storey asked for the captain's indulgence with a smile. "One moment, please."

THE old man turned away puffing with anger, violently wiping his face.

"Why does he want to badger me?" whimpered Harold. "If I had done it, would I come back to this room of my own free will this morning?"

"I don't know," said Mme. Storey dryly. "Perhaps you couldn't stand the suspense any longer."

"It's not so! I came back to try to make it up with Mrs. Lacy. I couldn't afford to quarrel with her. Now it's too late."

"Not too late if the will stands," said Mme. Storey very dryly indeed.

"I didn't do it," Harold reiterated sulkily.

"Well, when you left this suite as you say, where did you go?"

"I just wandered around," mumbled Harold. "I wanted to be alone. I'd had a blow. I'd had a blow. I went out on deck through the front end of the corridor. I went down to the deck where the third-class passengers stay. I sat down there to think things out."

"Did anybody see you sitting there?" asked Mme. Storey.

"No. There wasn't anybody around."

"Too bad," she said. "How long did you stay there?"

"A long time. I don't know. I got cold and came in again. I looked for a steward. I found one and told him—well, I admit I told him a story. I told him my cousin snored so loud I couldn't sleep, and asked him if there was a vacant cabin where I could lie down. He showed me one, and I slept there just as I was . . . The steward can prove it! We can easily find him!"

"What time was it when you spoke to him?"

"I don't know exactly. About half past twelve."

"No good," said Mme. Storey. "Both Mrs. Lacy and her husband were gone then. We have pretty definitely established the fact that she was dropped overboard before eleven thirty."

"Well, what do you pick on me for?" whined Harold. "Why couldn't Wes have done it? I left him alone in his room. And Mrs. Lacy was alone in her room. He always makes out he's so much cleverer than me. Calls me a fool."

"Certainly Wes could have done it," said Mme. Storey calmly. She

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turned to Wes, who was grinning confidently. "What did you do after Harold left you?" she asked.

"Went to bed and slept till morning," said Wes definitely, "and nobody can prove otherwise!"

"You appear confident," said Mme. Storey, pleasantly.

"What's to be done now, ma'am?" asked Captain Coulson.

She said: "I recommend that the three suspected persons be confined in separate cabins, with a steward outside each door."

"You've got nothing on me!" snarled Wes Lacy.

"No," said Mme. Storey. "But you *could* have done it, you see."

She went on in a lower tone for the captain's ear alone: "You'd better put the girl in an inside cabin."

He said, startled: "You think that *she* . . ."

"No," I don't," said Mme Storey. "But she was desperately in love with the missing man. She might cast herself out of the porthole as a gesture."

"Very well, ma'am."

MME. STOREY went on: "I must have your authority to search the effects of the three suspected persons. Also Mrs. Mackworth's effects and Ronny's."

"You have it, ma'am."

"I don't know what I shall find. Incriminating evidence, as you know, can always be thrown overboard. But it's obviously something that must be done. As soon as I've finished my search I'll let you know."

So the inquiry was adjourned, and the suspected three led away. Mme. Storey ate a bite and I set to work. I need not go into the details of the tedious search. Suffice it to say that it was after dinner before we finished.

At nine o'clock we were gathered again in the sitting-room of the Imperial suite. The commander, his staff captain, who was in direct charge of the passengers, and a couple of under officers were present. The suspects were brought in.

Mme. Storey went direct to the point. "Amongst Miss Van Vliet's effects I found nothing that throws any fresh light on the case. The jewelry she described to us was there. As Mr. Wes Lacy has confirmed her story of how she recovered it from Mrs. Mackworth there is nothing against Miss Van Vliet, and I suggest that she be released from further surveillance."

Captain Coulson was greatly pleased. He had never believed that Sigi was guilty. "You are free, miss," he said. "And my apologies for having subjected you to inconvenience."

Sigi, with her usual hard smile, started to assure him that he was forgiven, but she broke down in the middle of it and began to cry. If she had only known how much more attractive she was without her "dress uniform!"

Mme. Storey went on, in the quiet voice that conveyed no intimation of the bombshell she was about to throw: "Amongst Mr. Harold Lacy's effects I found nothing that could interest us. In the pocket of one of Mr. Wes Lacy's bags I made an interesting discovery." From her hand bag she produced a sheaf of engraved bonds and spread them on the table. "Twenty-five one-thousand-dollar Liberty bonds of the unregistered type."

Wes Lacy lost his confident, grinning air. "Those are not mine!" he cried out sharply. "I never saw them before! If they were found in my baggage they were planted there!"

"What connects them with the murders, ma'am?" asked Captain Coulson.

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Mme. Storey said: "I'm coming to that. Mrs. Mackworth was a methodical woman. Amongst her things I found a notebook in which she was accustomed to enter all her financial operations. Under yesterday's date I find this entry: 'Today I presented my dear husband with twenty-five one-thousand-dollar Liberty bonds as a wedding gift.' . . . The numbers of the bonds follow," Mme. Storey quietly concluded. "These are the bonds."

Captain Coulson struck his fist into his palm. "Then it was *he* who did it!" he cried.

"It's a lie!" cried Wes shrilly. "I tell you they were planted on me . . . planted!" He pointed a shaking finger at his cousin. "And he did it!"

It was Harold's turn to smile then. He could smile just as hatefully as his cousin.

"Well, a British jury will decide that," said the captain in grim satisfaction. "And my opinion is that those bonds will hang you!"

THAT ended the scene. The Lacys were taken away. I thought the good captain would never have done pumping my employer's arm up and down. "I said you'd do it in spite of all!" he cried. "And you did!"

Mme. Storey shrugged deprecatingly.

When we returned to our own cabins I noticed that she was looking pale and thin-lipped. "What a horrible case!" I said. "I'm thankful that you got to the bottom of it so quickly!"

"To the bottom of it!" she said with a strange look. "I have scarcely scratched the surface!"

I stared.

She swore under her breath. "Ah, I hate to be beaten!" she muttered, pacing the little room. "I hate to be beaten—even by the sea!"

"I don't understand!" I said.

"You have heard all the evidence," she said. "Think it through!"

That was all I could get out of her. She never will confide her thoughts in anybody until she has arrived at positive conclusions.

CHAPTER IV.

NEARLY FATAL PLUNGE.

UPON Mme. Storey's recommendation Captain Coulson immediately wirelessed an announcement of the tragedy back to America. "If it is any longer delayed, it will react against you," she warned him. So it was done. One could picture the sensation that was created.

The bluff captain detested the methods of the sensational press, and his message to the shore was characteristically terse. Consequently the ship was immediately deluged with messages demanding further details. Some fantastic prices were offered him for an exclusive story. He tore these messages up and paced his cabin in a rage. Mme. Storey expostulated with him.

"You can't buck the press, captain. They will always get back at you. Let me write out a plain, straightforward story and send it in your name." This was done.

Fantastic rumors had begun to fly around the ship, and it was obvious that the passengers must also be told what had happened. Captain Coulson insisted on writing this announcement himself, and next morning the following characteristically British notice was pinned up on the ship's bulletin board:

"Captain Coulson regrets to announce that Mrs. Ronald Macworth (the former Mrs. Hibbert

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Lacy) and Mr. Mackworth have disappeared from the ship, and are believed to have been flung overboard. Mr. Wesley Lacy and Mr. Harold Lacy, nephews of the late Hibbert Lacy, are being detained in custody for the police."

The effect of this on the passengrs can be conjectured. They almost went out of their minds with balked curiosity. They made the lives of the under officers miserable; they stormed Sigi Van Vliet's cabin, and our cabin, they tried to bribe the stewards to tell them in what part of the ship the prisoners were confined; they even ventured into the sacred precincts of the captain's cabin and demanded information. Individual passengers were by this time receiving messages from shore asking for stories. They had nothing to tell.

Captain Coulson was of a mind to have clapped them all in irons had that been possible. Mme. Storey finally persuaded him that the best way to deal with the situation was to allow her to receive a committee of the passengers in her cabin and tell them all we knew. This was done, and the storm subsided somewhat. But what a voyage!

It was generally assumed that Mme. Storey had completed her case, and that the rest was up to the British police. Only the commander and I knew that she was working on it in her own way throughout the remaining days of the voyage.

First she wirelessed her agent, Latham Rowe, in code, asking him to obtain the particulars of Mrs. Mackworth's will, and send them. In a few hours the answer came which, when decoded, read:

Mrs. M. made new will the morning she sailed. After several bequests the entire residual estate to her husband, Ronald Mackworth. Interest on trust fund three hundred thousand to each nephew. Sigismonda Van Vliet gets fifty thousand outright.—Latham.'

Mme. Storey put the message away without making any comment. So the nephews, either or both, had murdered in vain! I thought.

My employer spent the days wandering over the big ship in the guise of a simple curiosity-seeker, with particular reference to the tourist class and third. She ate a meal in each of these classes —"Just to see what they get," she said, and attended some of their entertainments. She made friends with the stewards everywhere, and with the employees in every department of the ship. Whatever it was she was looking for she didn't find it, because when she was off her guard that slight harassed line was never absent from between her brows.

THE only clue I got to her anxiety came when once she burst out impatiently: "The danger is that the stolid British jury *will* convict Wes Lacy on the evidence of those bonds."

"I hope they do," I said.

She grinned at me. "You only say that because he's a mean wretch, and everybody likes to see a mean wretch hanged.

"But I don't want to share in the responsibility of hanging him. The evidence is insufficient. If Wes is clever enough to have carried out this double crime it isn't reasonable to suppose that he would have left the bonds where anybody could find them."

"Then Harold must have planted them," I said.

"Maybe he did. But I can't hang it

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on him. There is also the possibility that neither of them committed the murders."

"Who else *could* have done it?"

"I don't know. That's what I'm trying to dope out."

We had to go on to Southampton, of course, instead of disembarking at Cherbourg. The English are supposed to be a steadier, more stable race than we are, but I must say that they were just as excited over the Lacy case as Americans could have been. Luckily the docks at Southampton are shut off from the town by gates, and by stationing guards at the gates the authorities were able to keep the populace out. The London train comes alongside the ship, and we just had a glimpse of the immense crowds from the car windows as we moved out.

We were told that thousands of people were already gathering around Waterloo Station in London.

However, the railway officials circumvented them by stopping the train at a little-used station called Vauxhall, whence we were spirited to our hotel in taxis.

Mme. Storey and I went to the Carlton. The news soon spread about, and hundreds of people began to mill around the building in the hope of getting a glimpse of us. Just like home.

We had to go to Scotland Yard and submit to endless questioning by the heads of the C. I. D. Mme. Storey was well-known to them by reputation, and they were courteous and respectful. Very fine men they are, too; but naturally, under the circumstances, they could not carry the case one step further. In the minds of the public Wes Lacy was already as good as hanged, but no professional investigator was satisfied with the evidence.

One of the strangest figures in the case was little Mrs. Mackworth, Ronny's mother, who at a single stroke lost her only son and found herself one of the richest women in the world. Mme. Storey's first act when she was free to do so, was to go to see her. It was purely an impulse of kindness, for Ronny's mother could have had no connection with the murders.

SHE lived in the suburb of Croydon in a little yellow brick house grimed with soot, one of an endless row of such houses lining both sides of a curving street. A more depressing street I have scarcely ever seen, but I must say that each of these horrid houses had a charming garden in the rear. The English are past masters of the art of gardening.

A maid admitted us, and we were taken through into the garden where a tea table was set. Mrs. Mackworth received us all in a flutter. She was a widow, fifty, I suppose; had been pretty in an insignificant way but it was now a very faded prettiness. A gentle, weak, ineffectual sort of woman, she wept copiously the whole time we were there.

We listened to a history of Ronny's life from birth. She brought out her photographs and we looked at Ronny in long baby clothes and short; in pinafores, knickers and slacks. Mrs. Mackworth had a fresh reserve of tears for almost every picture. She had some reason for her pride; Ronny had been a beautiful child at every age. Mme. Storey bore herself toward the little woman with endless kindness and sympathy. It was an exhausting call.

When it was printed in the newspapers that she had fallen heir to the Lacy fortune, the poor little woman was driven almost frantic by the hordes of people who descended on her; re-

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porters, press photographers, beggars and curiosity-seekers generally.

After two days of this, her solicitor spirited her out of town without telling anybody where he was taking her.

As soon as Scotland Yard expressed itself as being through with us, Mme. Storey and I flew over to Paris and put up at the Meurice under assumed names. For the moment we succeeded in keeping our identity a secret. But all the bloom had been taken off her vacation by this miserable tragedy. She worried over the case continually. When it should be called for trial we expected to go back to London.

One day she said out of the blue: "Mrs. Mackworth is in Paris. Let's go and call on her."

We found her in a modest hotel on the Rue Jacob, where she was known as Mme. Dare. She was unaffectedly glad to see us. She wept a little, but presently dried her tears. She was beautifully dressed. She felt it incumbent on her to apologize for the dinginess of her surroundings.

"Of course I could have gone to the Ritz, but my solicitor thought it wiser to live here under an assumed name. The estate won't be settled for months to come, but they tell me I can have all the money I want. I can hire a motor whenever I want, and I can buy clothes. It is all I have to do because I don't know anybody in Paris, and my solicitor said I must be *very* careful whom I spoke to."

And so on. And so on. Like a child. She was a touching figure. One trembled for her future.

AT the end of the week we went to see her again. The concierge of the little hotel told us that Madame Dare had gone away. Left no address. Mme. Storey shrugged.

When we got back to the Meurice she telegraphed to England and later she went to the central office to telephone. She did not tell me then what it was all about, but next morning on receipt of a message from England she said we were leaving for Orleans in half an hour.

"What for?" I asked.

"To try to find Mrs. Mackworth."

"What has she got to do with it?" I cried.

"I don't know," said Mme. Storey enigmatically. "There's something unexplained there, and I mean to find out what it is."

When we got to Orleans the bird had flown. We went to Lille, and from Lille half across France to Toulouse; then all the way back to Grenoble, a city at the foot of the Alps. From the style of telegrams that Mme. Storey received it was evident that she was having the little woman trailed. The success with which Mrs. Mackworth was evading us, suggested that she had her scouts out, too. Well, where a hundred millions is concerned, expense is no object.

In Grenoble we caught up with her for an hour. Walking along the little triangular plaza which forms the city center, we saw her looking in a shop-window across the way. It is wonderful what clothes will do for a woman; in one of the smart black dresses with a hat to match she looked almost young and beautiful. Mme. Storey pulled me into a doorway before she saw us.

One of Mme. Storey's sleuths brought word to our hotel that Mrs. Mackworth was at the Majestic. He was sent back to watch, and to report to us when she went out again. Mme. Storey then intended to go to the Majestic, and if possible secure a room next to Mrs. Mackworth's.

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Unfortunately when the man returned it was to tell us that a motor-car had driven up to the Majestic, whereupon Mrs. Mackworth had issued from the hotel with her baggage and had driven away out of town. Our man learned that she had hired the car to drive her to Digne, a small town in a valley of the Alps some distance from Grenoble.

Mme. Storey sent for another car. She was informed that there was only one garage in town that could supply drivers accustomed to the Alpine roads. A car was at the door within ten minutes, and we could not have been more than half an hour behind our fugitive when we set out. Immediately upon leaving the city streets we began the first long zigzag climb into the mountains. It was about five o'clock.

OUR car was an old Renault saloon, battered in appearance, but still capable of good speed. The driver was a dark, hairy Frenchman of the Southern type, very villainous-looking. He was inclined to be sociable—too sociable for my taste, and carried on a conversation with Mme. Storey for most of the way with his head half-turned. He spoke a rude patois and I couldn't understand a word of it.

A short distance out of town she made him stop at a filling station where she asked some questions. She was told that a car similar to ours had passed a short time before with a single woman passenger. At a second filling station she was told the same thing. Satisfied then, that we were on the right road, she did not make him stop again, but told him to drive at his best speed.

Time passed. We crossed one high pass after another. The scenes were marvelously beautiful, but I had little heart for it. The way in which our driver whipped around the curves with awful precipices yawning a few inches from the grinding tires, terrified me. I felt a profound distrust of the man with his fawning voice, though I could see he was a skillful driver.

Finally, at a moment when our driver's attention was fully occupied with the road, I whispered to Mme. Storey: "I don't like this man."

"Neither do I," she answered with the greatest cheerfulness. "And what's more I think he's taking the wrong road. He drives past the signboards so fast I can't read them. I have no map. All I know is, that Digne is on the way to Nice, and I know from the general appearance of the map that Nice is South of Grenoble. The sun is setting in the back window. He's driving East."

She told him he was to slow down when he came to the next signpost, but he drove past one at full speed, and made believe he had forgotten. There were some peasants working in a field a short distance ahead, and she ordered him to stop so that she could speak to them. He disobeyed her with the greatest coolness. Mme. Storey's face turned grim. She said nothing, but took out the little automatic that she always carries in her handbag. I shivered.

It was a very sparsely settled country, and some minutes passed before we saw anybody else. The sun was down now. We ought to have arrived at Digne before this. Finally a rough shack came into view with some peasants sitting before it. Mme. Storey ordered our chauffeur to stop. He flashed a look over his shoulder, saw the gun, and applied his brakes.

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When Mme. Storey asked the peasant if we were on the right road to Digne, he and his womenfolk roared with laughter. Why Digne lay a good fifty kilometers over the mountains to the South. Why hadn't he watched the signs?

OUR driver broke into a torrent of apologies and self-reproaches; cast his cap on the ground and tore at his hair. How could he have been such a fool as to take the wrong turning! We were not in the least deceived by this display. It was clear that he meant us no good.

But we assumed that his object was simply robbery, and Mme. Storey being armed, felt confident that she could handle the situation. It never occurred to us that he might be in the pay of those who were trying to spirit poor Mrs. Mackworth away.

She asked the nearest place where we could spend the night and was told there was a village about thirty kilometers ahead of us and it had a good hotel. Whereupon she sternly ordered the driver to get under his wheel and drive on.

It grew quite dark. The sky was heavily overcast. There was no more conversation from the front seat, but the driver kept sadly shaking his head as if to assure us of his undying remorse. Mme. Storey had the little gun lying on the seat beside her. For reasons of his own the man now drove very slowly. When Mme. Storey ordered him to speed up, he twiddled the levers on his wheel and told her it was impossible. There was something wrong with his spark.

We climbed again, crossed another pass, and saw lights in the far distance below us. My heart lifted up a little; the promised village! We wound down a mountainside, and came out above a lake. The village lay at the other end of it, all the lights casting long spears of light into the dark water.

The road here was carved out of the solid rocky slopes above the lake. The water, I should say, was about a hundred feet below us at the bottom of a deep slide of rock with bushes growing here and there in the interstices. Our driver slowed down more and more, and Mme. Storey bruskly commanded him to go on.

He grinned at us over his shoulder, hideously. Instead of obeying, he suddenly turned the car out of the road. As he went over the edge, he slipped from under the wheel and dropped off the running board. We plunged down. I heard myself screaming. In three seconds I died a hundred deaths.

CHAPTER V.

UNPLEASANT SURPRISE.

IT was Mme. Storey's marvelous quickness that saved both our lives. She got the door open, but she had the wit not to fling herself out, nor let me do so. Our brains would have been dashed out on the rocks. She waited until the car plunged into the water. The impact with the water smashed the open door clean off its hinges. Then somehow she struggled out through the door, dragging me after her.

We rose to the surface of the water. She clapped a hand over my mouth to keep me from screaming again. She whispered urgently in my ear: "He will be watching to make sure that we are gone!" You may be sure that I closed my mouth then.

We paddled softly back to the rocks,

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and crept along the edge, keeping our bodies submerged, until we came to some bushes which cast a shadow over our heads. There we hung in the icy water. We could hear the man coming cautiously down the slope, displacing stones which rattled down ahead of him.

Presently we could vaguely make him out, standing at the edge of the water, peering this way and that and listening. I held my breath. When he was certain that we were done for, he cast his cap out on the water, and deliberately letting himself into it, while clinging to the rocks, ducked his head under. Then climbing out, he started to claw his way up the rocks bawling for help. The little mountain lake echoed with his cries.

Mme. Storey laughed. "What an actor!"

We drew ourselves out of the water. Our would-be murderer set off running in the road towards the village, still bawling. We wrung the water out of our clothes as well as we could, and restored circulation by climbing up to the road. We, too, turned toward the village.

In a few minutes we saw some jigging lights approaching and heard voices. "We must hide," said Mme. Storey.

We climbed up the bed of the torrent until we were well above the road, and sat down to watch.

Presently the villagers came straggling along the road with their lanterns. In the van staggered our chauffeur like a man drunk with grief, crying and tearing his hair. Rage churned inside me, and I prayed that that scoundrel might come to a bad end.

When they had gone, we returned to the road. Outside the village it ran into a North and South road. The South arm of the signpost was marked "Digne 58 kilometers" and we turned that way. Ranges of dark mountains barred our way; there was not a light anywhere in that direction, and I confess that my heart sunk into my boots.

HOWEVER, at the top of the first long rise, we met a motor-lorry toiling up the other side. It was driven by a young lad who was singing at the top of his lungs. How amazed he was when his lights picked up two bedraggled ladies standing in the road! He stopped, and Mme. Storey parleyed with him. A simple youth.

He had been to Nice with a consignment of wool and was returning empty. He still had a hundred kilometers to go before he would be home. My employer told him a very sketchy story of having been held up on the road, and our car stolen. He appeared to take it at face value. We were going to Nice, she said; would he turn around and help us on our way.

He demurred, thinking of home and supper. Why not let him take us back to Payol-sur-lac? There was a hotel. He had only just enough *essence* (gasoline) to take him home. Mme. Storey assured him that she would buy the *essence,* and would pay him well besides, for his time. "I have money hidden on me that the robbers overlooked," she said.

Finally he consented, and we climbed into the seat beside him. I don't think he discovered that our clothes were damp, but anyhow he gave us a blanket which we wrapped around both of us. He turned his truck around and we banged down the other side of the hill. Mme. Storey laid herself out to win him, and that was not hard. His name was Henri.

By the time we had reached Digne

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two hours later, he was her slave. She let him understand in a subtle manner that there was a certain mystery connected with our movements, and that he must protect our secret. He swore eternal fealty, and announced that he was going to drive us to Nice if she would condescend to use so rude a conveyance. Fatigue was unknown to him. Why not drive straight through that night?

We reached Nice at dawn and had ourselves carried to a little hotel in the Italian quarter, so humble that our bedraggled state would not be conspicuous. Henri was very reluctant to leave us. He was sure that we would require his services later. We could trust him to the death.

Mme. Storey reminded him that he must think of his family. Meanwhile she had got hold of a map, and she gave Henri a letter that for certain mysterious reasons, must positively be posted in a certain village to the east of his usual route home. Thus she kept him out of Payol-sur-lac.

AS soon as the stores opened we bought some clothes and moved to a better lodging, but still in the Italian quarter, the oldest and poorest part of the town. We were not likely to run into anybody who knew us there.

Owing to our accident, Mme. Storey had lost touch with her agents. But as it had become increasingly evident that her agents were under the surveillance of somebody else's agents, she let them go. Having visited the Riviera on several occasions, she was acquainted with the Chief of Police of Nice, and she sent him a note. The great man himself came to visit us at our humble hotel during the afternoon, very plainly dressed, and further disguised by a pair of dark glasses.

Mme. Storey told him what had happened to us; and from his expletives and from the way his eyes flashed I judged that the villainous Marbaud was going to get his, all right. However, that had to wait for the moment.

"This Englishwoman obviously, has fallen into the hands of criminals," Mme. Storey told the Chief of Police. "I don't yet know what their game is, though I may have my suspicions. At any rate since the murder of her son and her son's wife has not been satisfactorily solved, it is up to us to discover what is going on."

"Assuredly, Madame!"

It was quite simple for the police to find Mrs. Mackworth. An hour after he had left us, the Chief of Police was able to telephone Mme. Storey that she was registered at the Hotel Negresco under the name of Mme. Thomas. She had taken a place for the performance of "Faust" at the Casino that night. Upon hearing this, Mme. Storey arranged with him to introduce us into the hotel while Mrs. Mackworth was out of it.

With the police backing us, it was all quite simple. The people who occupied the room next to Mrs. Mackworth's were shifted to another part of the hotel, and at ten o'clock Mme. Storey and I were conducted through a service entrance, and carried upstairs in a service elevator, and taken into the room without having met anybody. Our room had a door communicating with Mrs. Mackworth's room, locked of course. My employer was provided with a key to it. Also she had borrowed a gun from the police.

If, as Americans are fond of terming it, Nice is France's Atlantic City on the Mediterranean, the Negresco is the Traymore of Nice. Rather old-fash-

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ioned according to our notions, it is still a magnificent hotel occupying the choicest position on the front. Mrs. Mackworth had taken one of the best rooms facing the sea. Evidently the little woman was coming out.

MME. STORY sat down close to the communicating door where she could hear anything that took place in the next room. I drifted to the window of our room to watch the throngs of people weaving back and forth on the promenade.

Shortly after eleven my employer smiled at me, and her lips shaped the words: "She has come home." And a few minutes later: "She has a visitor."

Mme. Storey picked up the telephone and I went to the door to listen. I heard the rumble of a man's voice in Mrs. Mackworth's room, but could not distinguish what he was saying. Meanwhile my employer was telephoning to the policeman who was awaiting such a call, to tell him to take up his position outside Mrs. Mackworth's door, to allow no one to leave. He was to tap lightly on our door when he came, to let us know he was at his post.

We heard his signal. Mme. Storey taking the gun in her hand, but keeping it behind her, went to the communicating door. She softly inserted the key, turned it, and pulled the door open. Quick as she was, the man in the next room was quicker. He was gone when we looked in. We had heard a door close. As no sound came from the corridor, we knew that he must have slipped into the bathroom.

Mrs. Mackworth wearing a charming evening dress, and with her hair touched up and dressed by a master coiffeur, gazed at us in stupefaction. So complete was her surprise, that a moment passed before she recognized us.

"Madame . . . Madame Storey!" she stammered.

"Sorry to walk in on you like this," said my employer, "but I must see your visitor."

Mrs. Mackworth's hand went to her throat. She swallowed hard. "I . . . have no visitor," she whispered huskily.

Mme. Storey silently pointed to an expensive Panama hat, light-weight overcoat and malacca stick lying on a chair. Mrs. Mackworth gave up. She began to tremble and weep in a piteous manner.

"Open the bathroom door," said Mme. Storey. "Speak to him first or he may decide to shoot you in mistake for me."

The wretched little woman crossed the room. Her legs would scarcely bear her up. At the door she faltered: "Come out. It is no use."

Mme. Storey took up a position where she would be behind the door when it opened. He came out. He too, was armed. Mme. Storey said sharply:

"Drop that gun or I'll shoot!"

Turning his head he saw that she had him covered. The gun clattered to the floor and I pounced upon it.

It was Ronald Mackworth. He had dyed his hair, added a blond mustache, and in some manner had bleached his tanned skin. His appearance was greatly altered, but he could not conceal his good looks.

"Mme. Storey! This *is* a surprise!" he said impudently.

"Surprise is not the word for it!" she retorted dryly.

She looked at me, and I went to the hall door and summoned the policeman. Mme. Storey said to him:

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"You are to arrest this gentleman. Put the handcuffs on him."

MRS. MACKWORTH collapsed on a sofa with a pitiful cry. Ronny stepped back showing his teeth. But Mme. Storey's gun was still in play.

"Must I submit to this humiliation?" he muttered.

"Well, naturally," said my employer. "You know what you're wanted for."

"You believe that I am a murderer," he said, "but it's not true! Mother," he cried in theatrical fashion, "do you believe that I did this thing?"

"No! No! No!" she wailed.

Mme. Storey signaled to the policeman to do his duty and the steel bracelets clicked around Ronny's elegant wrists. He ground his teeth in despair.

"So you are innocent," said Mme. Storey dryly.

"I am."

"Do you care to explain your extraordinary disappearance after the tragedy?"

He had recovered his assurance. He shrugged. "I'll have to explain it to the police. Why not to you? May I smoke?"

Mme. Storey handed a cigarette to the policeman, who stuck it in Ronny's mouth and put a match to it. He drew on it deeply.

"I have to confess to cheating and deceit," he began in his cultivated English voice, "but not to murder. What was I? A penniless young actor—not even a good actor. My face was my fortune as the milkmaid said. This rich old woman fell in love with me and asked me to marry her. Who wouldn't have jumped at the chance? I said I would, though I was in love with another woman. The other woman urged me to take her. She wouldn't live forever, we told each other."

"Yes, yes," said Mme. Storey impatiently. "This is an ordinary story. *But how did you contrive to disappear?*"

He smiled. "Well, it's something to be able to baffle Mme. Storey. I was booked twice on the *Baratoria* under two different names and in two different classes, first and tourist. I was provided with two passports, two sets of baggage and in fact, two wives—and one child in the tourist class. I was two entirely different people."

"What was your name in your second incarnation?"

He hesitated at this question, scowling.

"You might as well tell me. There are hundreds to identify you."

He shrugged. "John Thurlow."

"What was the purpose of this elaborate deception if you were not planning the murder of Mrs. Lacy?"

"Merely so that I would not be parted from the other one. I wanted to be able to visit her during the voyage."

"How could you have visited her?"

"FIRST-CLASS passengers are permitted to wander at will over the vessel. I could have gone to her room, put on my disguise and showed myself on deck with her."

"Were you married to her?"

"No. I would have been if I could. She had a husband living."

"And the child?"

"His."

"How did you start the business?"

"Perfectly easy. John Thurlow, wife and child, boarded the tourist section of the *Baratoria* two hours before she sailed, as many passengers do. Af-

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ter showing myself all over that part of the vessel, I took off my disguise in my cabin—so many people milling about the ship nobody noticed the new face, and returned inconspicuously to the pier. There I met my man-servant who had brought my baggage down, we went aboard over the first-class gangway, and established ourselves."

"Very ingenious," said Mme. Storey. "And what happened that night?"

"When I first missed my wife—I mean my real wife, I went in search of her over the vessel. I met you and Miss Brickley, you remember. Not finding her, I returned to the Imperial suite to wait for her. When she failed to return, I became anxious. I noticed, what had escaped me in the beginning, a wet spot on the floor that suggested blood might have been spilled there, and later washed out.

"I had every reason to suspect my wife's nephews by marriage. Not knowing that she had already made a will in my favor, I guessed that they had put her out of the way. Well, since the will *was* in my favor, I knew that I would never be able to persuade the world that I had not killed her, and the easiest way out seemed to be to make it appear that they had killed me too. So, by leaving my clothes there, I made my way by unfrequented passages back to the tourist class; resumed my disguise and remained there throughout the voyage."

"Of course you had the advantage of the pretended wife and child for additional camouflage."

"Quite so."

"And during the last few days you have been trying to get in touch with your mother in order to obtain money."

"Sure, I had to have money," he coolly admitted.

"You were counting on the fact that your mother would have to stand by you."

He shrugged. "Well, she's my mother."

"You have made a mistake though, in trying to have me murdered," Mme. Storey went on in the same dry voice. "That makes me a little unsympathetic to your story."

"I don't know what you mean," he said, trying to stare her down.

"Never mind," she said.

Of course she didn't believe his preposterous story, which after all, included so much that was true. He didn't expect her to believe it. What he banked on was, that no jury would convict in the absence of the body.

"One more question," said Mme. Storey. "What was the number of the cabin in the tourist class occupied by the Thurlows?"

HE hesitated again for a fraction of a second; but reflecting that this was bound to come out anyway, answered: "437."

"Bella," said Mme. Storey, "there's a tourist agency in the hotel. It will be closed at this hour of course, but I want you to try find the person in charge of it. If you can get hold of him, obtain from him a cabin plan of the steamship *Baratoria*."

I left them. I found that the tourist agent occupied a small room in the hotel, and by great luck I found him in bed. Inside of half an hour I was back in Mrs. Mackworth's room with the desired plan.

Mme. Storey spread it out on the table, studied it, counted the marked portholes on each deck from stem to stern. The manacled Ronny affected to grin, but there was anxiety in his eyes. Finally Mme. Storey said:

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"I find that room 437 in the tourist class is on 'D' deck, immediately under the principal bedroom of the Imperial suite on 'B' deck. I assume that you as Thurlow, made sure of that when you booked the cabin. What happened is now clear to me. Let me tell you my story."

"Go ahead," said Ronny.

"You stabbed your wife as soon as you were left alone with her. You lowered her body into the sea with a piece of hempen rope that you had brought for that purpose and threw the rope after her. You then made believe to search the ship for her. This was to provide evidence that she had died before you, so that you could inherit without dispute.

"I assume that your plan was a matter of gradual development. Only thus can I explain the fact that the second piece of rope you bought was of a different sort. This was cotton rope, a piece twice as long as necessary. In the middle of this piece you made a slip knot over the hook above the porthole, and let the slack hang down outside the ship.

"You then lowered yourself down the rope—let us assume it had knots in it, until you were opposite the porthole of cabin 437. There the lady who passed as Mrs. Thurlow pulled you in.

"All you had to do then, was to pull the slack end of the rope, bring away the slip knot above, and throw the rope into the sea.

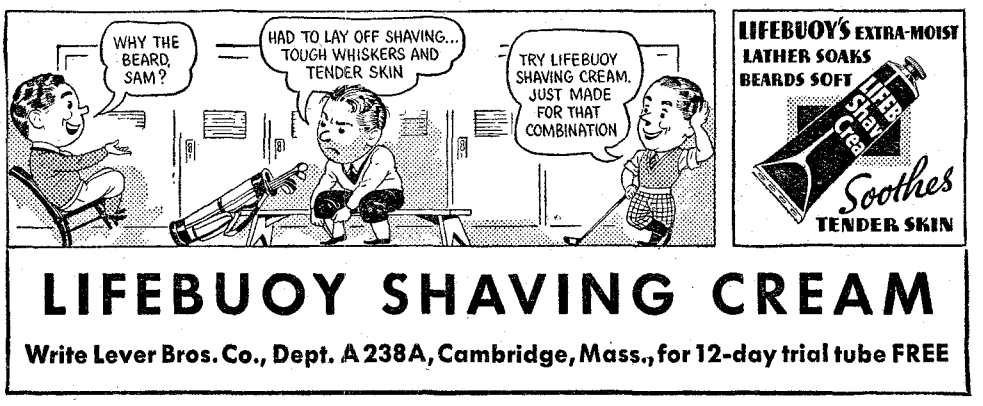
"A very daring plan, but I suppose the stake of a hundred millions and freedom justified it."

Ronny's head had sunk down between his shoulders. He was breathing hard and showing his teeth. Not beautiful then. But he still attempted to brazen it out. "We'll see!" he sneered.

We did see. As everybody knows, he was hanged. It happened that he was *not* married to the lady who passed as Mrs. Thurlow. Consequently under the curious workings of the law of inheritance, Mrs. Mackworth, poor little woman, continues in possession of the great Lacy fortune. Well, it is better that she should have it than the two weakling nephews.

THE END

Coming—Other *Madame Storey novelettes*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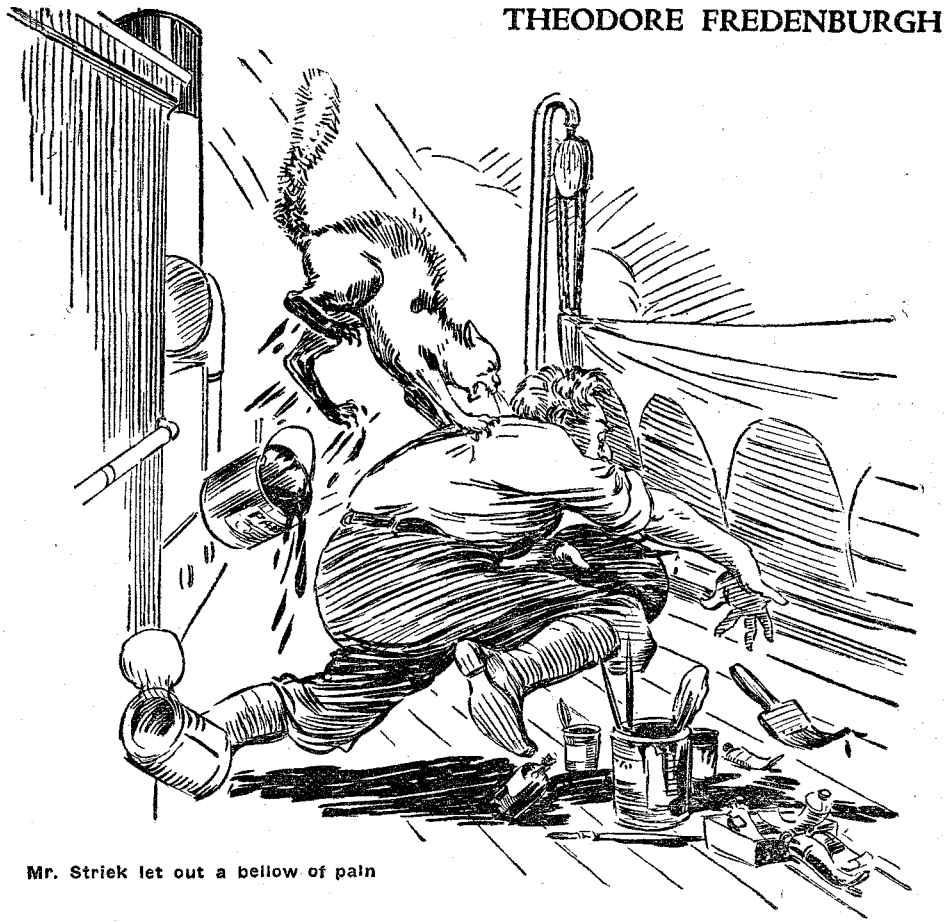
The Eyes Had *It*

THEODORE FREDENBURGH



Mr. Striek let out a bellow of pain

A cross-eyed cat on a catnip jag, a lovesick mate and two stowaways make a pretty madhouse of the good ship Lebanon as she sails the Mediterranean

ACCORDING to Hardy, the Lebanon's red-haired wireless operator, Chief Mate Arcturus Absalom Striek was as thick between the ears as he was through the shoulders. He hinted as much when he came upon the mate and Miss Emilie Johnson, their heads together over a mariner's sextant on the Lebanon's small passenger deck, a few hours after the converted ocean tramp cleared Bizert for other North African ports.

"I hope you are not disturbing me," he grinned impudently from the corner of the deck house.

Mr. Striek drew his tousled blond head away from Miss Johnson's chestnut curls, and an expression of melancholy disgust settled over the sunbrowned and rugged features.

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"Of course you've met Mr. Hardy?" Mr. Striek said with ponderous irony. "He's the young hero who sinks with the ship while his key snaps out the one about the traveling salesman. Very romantic. He sinks with the ship and comes up on the the front page of the newspapers."

"Don't thank me," Hardy retorted imperturbably. "What's that in your hand—a sextant? I get it. You've been showing Miss Johnson how with the aid of compasses, compass stations, the sun, moon and stars, hydrographic charts, weather reports and lighthouses —plus a sextant and sheer brilliance— you keep a ship from going aground in ten thousand square miles of water. A strong back and a weak mind, Miss Johnson, makes a seaman. Look at what happened on the foredeck this morning, leaving Bizert."

Mr. Striek's jaw hardened perceptibly, and Miss Johnson's face abruptly sobered, then registered polite interest.

THE next morning, bowed over the 'midship winch, with palette brushes, red paint, and the urge to decorate which had been born with his passion for Miss Emilie Johnson, Mr. Striek scowled, remembering Hardy's intrusion.

"Look what happened on the foredeck, leaving Bizert," he muttered scornfully, aping Hardy's sugary tone.

What had happened on the foredeck was, in its way, classic. Mr. Striek had flushed two enormous black stowaways in a forward hold soon after the Lebanon cleared Bizert, and unceremoniously hustled them on deck. As good Moslems they resented being hustled by a Christian dog, and one of them, taking Mr. Striek off guard, laid a length of half-inch pipe alongside the mate's head.

Although knocked into the scuppers by the blow, Mr. Striek had bounced promptly to his feet and had done a workmanlike job of swabbing the deck with the pair, and rounded it off by heaving them into the mail locker under the fo'c's'le head. This feat, unbeknownst to Mr. Striek, had been witnessed by Emilie Johnson from the porthole of her stateroom which overlooked the foredeck.

Being a missionary's daughter, she had been torn between admiration for the courage and the poetry of Mr. Striek's powerful brown body and flag of golden hair and her awareness of the biblical admonition that a soft answer turneth away wrath. In the end she made disturbing comparisons between the washed-out males who found their way to her father's compound and the riotous health of Mr. Striek, who, emerging from the fray battered but grinning, was, within an hour, explaining to her with boyish gravity the intricacies of the mariner's sextant.

Hardy had appeared in the middle of Mr. Striek's lesson in navigation, and for the first time Emilie Johnson had realized all was not well between them.

In the cool of that evening when the North African coast was a melody in blue and rose-mauve, and the western sky a glorious madness of scarlet and gold and opalescent green, she had waylaid Captain Romany Morehouse, who puffed his ruddy old cheeks and, between fierce growls of protest, allowed her to wheedle the story from him.

The feud between Hardy and the mate, Captain Morehouse had told her, dated from a day at Sfax when Mr. Striek, with the aid of some educated

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dice, cleaned Hardy, thereby preventing the red-haired wireless operator from using his own dice which possessed virtues in Hardy's favor to stagger the imagination.

The same day Mr. Striek's superior attainments in pelf and physique had filched from Hardy a sloe-eyed Armenian girl. Her heart, Hardy had boasted, was wrapped cocoon-like in silken strands of his spinning.

Healing of the breach had not been helped by the fact that Mr. Striek, coming off watch one evening a few weeks later, entered his cabin with a cheery whistle for his pet canary, Jasper, only to find that the yellow hell-cat Hardy kept as a pet had done Jasper in; leaving only a few pitiful downy feathers to mark the crime. Loyalty ran deep in Mr. Striek, and he swore to have revenge for an act which, in his rage and grief, Mr. Striek believed had been premeditated.

GRUMBLING sourly as he worked at embroidering the Lebanon's dingy winch with breezily looping fragments of anchor chain, stripes, and more or less gracefully skimming flying fish in honor of her one and only passenger, Mr. Striek was oblivious to the world about him.

On the boat deck, which extended aft of Mr. Striek's position, Hardy, after cautiously reconnoitering the mate and the passenger deck from the cover of the smokestack, stole silently to the edge of the boat deck directly above Mr. Striek's bowed shoulders, with an immense yellow cat couched sullenly in the crock of his arm.

A grin of satanic satisfaction distorted the wireless operator's face as he contemplated Mr. Striek's arched back and the red paint pot poised on the winch's gear-guard at his elbow. Glancing furtively about, Hardy suddenly tossed the cat down upon the mate and dived for cover behind a near-by ventilator.

The cat dropped with its forepaws on Mr. Striek's back and its hind legs in the paint pot. Simultaneous with Mr. Striek's bellow of pain, the cat yowled and dragged its hind quarters out of the paint pot by dint of sinking its claws into Mr. Striek's back. The paint gushed a red flood over Mr. Striek's recent handiwork, and the pot whanged dully to the deck plates. By this time Mr. Striek knew what had him, and recklessly flung the cat and a few strips of skin clear. The yellow demon arched its back and hissed like a devil, and then, apparently realizing that Mr. Striek was anything but intimidated, scrambled onto the winch, and by an amazing feat leaped ten feet to the edge of the boat deck as Mr. Striek, having located and caught up a metal paint scraper, let fly. The cat went straight up in the air as the scraper sizzled beneath its belly and came down yowling and spitting with its fur standing out like quills on a porcupine. The paint scraper skittered madly across the boat deck, caromed off a ring bolt, and dived through the engine-room skylight amid a ringing crash of broken glass.

Mr. Striek vented an inarticulate yelp of fury and gathered himself to tell the world what was on his mind. Gone were his fine dreams of Miss Emilie Johnson. His world was a bedlam of furies howling for expression.

At Mr. Striek's back a window slammed sharply open and the beefy face of Captain Romany Morehouse, his shag of white eyebrow twitching indignantly, appeared.

"Avast there, Mr. Striek!" he bel-

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lowed apoplectically. "Have you nothing better to do than to heave deck gear at a cat?"

Mr. Striek half turned to deliver himself of a retort and came face to face with MacNutt, the Lebanon's horse-faced chief engineer.

"Smoshin' winders like a gilly," MacNutt jeered dourly. "Dinna ye ken, ye great lout, a sheep at sea is na' a sarndbox wi' objects foor bairns tae putch aboot?"

"Damned braying ass," Mr. Striek retorted, referring to the contour of MacNutt's face.

"Ye blasted goony!" MacNutt roared.

"You'll find that skylight glass on the payroll!" Captain Morehouse bellowed in a purple rage.

MR. STRIEK turned in good earnest to have it out with the beetling face framed by the square of the cabin window. He turned with a big brown fist raised for s h a k i n g at Morehouse—and stopped in mid career.

On the passenger deck abeam of the captain's cabin, Emilie Johnson stared with wide brown eyes at him. Her clasped hands covered her mouth and she seemed frozen in an attitude of terrified fascination. To Mr. Striek her manner was a rebuke that cut like the deep stab of a knife; abruptly his closed fist dropped and he frantically sought soft words with which to beguile her.

None came.

Captain Romany Morehouse noticed his sudden change of expression and jerked his head inside the window like a wise old turtle ducking into its shell. MacNutt sputtered an instant and then his face blossomed with the holier-than-thou smirk he reserved for the rare occasions when he visited the kirk in his own Scottish village.

In the space of a second or two strained silence had overtaken the tumult. Then Hardy dashed, grinning, into view on the boat deck and, scooping the unprotesting cat into his arms, descended nimbly to the deck and without a glance at Mr. Striek or MacNutt mounted to the passenger deck. He bowed gallantly by the girl's side.

"Mr. Striek is a born clown," he said, throwing an acid smile across his shoulder toward Mr. Striek. "He'll do anything for a laugh. Won't you, Mr. Striek?"

"You—you—" Mr. Striek, at a loss for words and afraid to say too much, muttered from the deck below.

"Sometimes it's hard to tell just what Mr. Striek is driving at," Hardy went on with sugary venom. "Still he *is* a riot. Ha-ha."

"Is your cat hurt?" Emilie Johnson took her hands from her mouth and stroked the cat gently. She was rewarded with a spitting growl and a glare as if it would like to tear her limb from limb.

"Look out, Miss Emilie." Mr. Striek suddenly found his voice and started forward. Inexplicably Hardy's cat meowed plaintively and nuzzled Emilie Johnson's hand. Mr. Striek groaned.

"You might have been less cruel," she chided him gently.

"You don't understand," Mr. Striek protested.

"But you did throw that awful thing at him. Didn't he, kitty?" She cuddled the cat's head, and the cat purred like an angel.

"Don't get too near that cat," Mr. Striek w a r n e d her bitterly. "It's treacherous as a panther."

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"A guilty conscience, eh," Hardy leered over the pipe rail. "What made it lose faith in men? Answer me that, Mr. Michael Angelo Striek."

"You shut up," Mr. Striek returned in a controlled tone. "I don't answer to any crackpot wireless men now or any other time."

"Look at that cat's eyes," Hardy cried indignantly. "Just look at that cat's eyes, Miss Johnson."

A WORRIED frown appeared on Mr. Striek's brow. That cat had always been cock-eyed—born that way. What the devil was that spark-daffy loon up to now?

"Why, it's cross-eyed," she cried, surprised.

"Cross-eyed! Yes!" Hardy echoed bitterly.

"Now, look here—" Mr. Striek sensed shallow water beneath his keel and sounded cautiously.

"Two years ago it could spot a light at night and meow before the watch officer or the lookout saw it—that was in the Loomis. Mr. Striek was second mate and had the graveyard watch—twelve to four. Good far-seeing eyes my cat had until, one night, the lookout belled a light five seconds before the cat meowed."

"Don't you listen to him, Miss Emilie," Mr. Striek pleaded distractedly. "He's a—"

"What?" Emilie queried, primly arching her fine brows, as Mr. Striek faltered over saying "liar" right out to her.

"Well, you better not set much store by what he says, that's all," he fumbled the moment miserably.

"Oh, I'm lying, I suppose?" Hardy smiled knowingly at Miss Johnson. "You'd pull that, of course," he snapped. "Listen, Miss Emilie. It took me six months to discover what was making my cat cross-eyed. It was the ship's carpenter gave me the clue. An auger!"

"What in the world is an auger?" the attractive Miss Johnson wanted to know.

"An auger," Mr. Striek cut in sarcastically, "is used to bore holes. Mr. Hardy is going to tell you an old seagoing chestnut about how he found that his cat had been watching a rat hole behind the steward's dry stores, and somebody—I, he will tell you—bored another near it, and the cat, being a fine, conscientious cat, got cross-eyed trying to watch both holes at once."

"He admits it!" Hardy crowed triumphantly, wagging an accusing finger. "He stands there and convicts himself out of his own mouth. Thought you would throw out a smokescreen with that old chestnut wheeze, didn't you? Miss Emilie isn't the silly woman you said—"

He stopped with a confused air. "Well, she knows who's making an alibi," he concluded acridly.

A dark flush suddenly sprung into Miss Johnson's face and her eyes became cold.

"I never said anything of the kind!" Mr. Striek bristled like a mastiff and trembled.

"It doesn't matter," Miss Johnson said quietly. "I should have known better than to take passage on a vessel of this kind. First there was that horrible affair of the poor stowaways, and now this. Under the circumstances I think I shall not go ashore with you tonight at Algiers, Mr. Striek. It would be a very dull excursion for you, I am sure."

"No, no," Mr. Striek pleaded miserably. "Those lug—stowaways were

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tough. They beaned me with an iron pipe."

"Excuse me, please." Miss Johnson daintily moved back from the rail.

"I'd love to take you ashore," Hardy said loudly. "Think of what you will miss if you stay aboard this stuffy hooker when you could be seeing the most exciting town in North Africa."

"Thank you, I—" Miss Johnson glanced down at Mr. Striek, and a queer smile hovered around her mouth. "I'll go. I shall be ready at seven. I shall feel quite safe with you, Mr. Hardy."

"Oh, absolutely," Hardy caroled.

Mr. Striek sagged, and his spirits reached an all-time low.

"Sarves ye richt." MacNutt, who had stood silently goggling like a sorrel donkey throughout the conversation, added his drop of gall to the mate's cup of bitterness.

Mr. Striek turned from him in silence.

OUTBOUND after a night at Algiers, the Lebanon passed the breakwater during Mr. Striek's watch at five o'clock in the morning. The melancholy pre-dawn light had faded before the gushing rose-gold of the tropical sunrise.

Captain Romany Morehouse, with his neck wrapped around in a rainbow-hued scarf, stood solidly on the bridge by the whistle cord and wondered if he had a crackpot chief mate on his hands; for Mr. Striek, with a beaming smile, idled to and fro in the cool morning light, and his glance, when it met the sour gloom of Captain Romany Morehouse, danced and cavorted gayly. Once or twice he pursed his lips for whistling, but habit asserted itself and he hummed a lilting tune instead.

What a night's work, he told himself. What a job he had done on that cockroach, Hardy. He paused and brooded happily on the mauve sea that was sparkling fairylike in the first mellow rays of the morning sun.

Last night she had come out of her cabin and stopped under the flood lights near the gangway. Mr. Striek chuckled audibly. He had marched thoughtfully from the shadows of the starboard alley with his nose stuck in a copy of the Seaman's Guide that looked like a little Bible. How she had craned her neck to see. How she had walked around and around trying in the difficult light to make sure.

Once or twice she had been on the point of speaking to him, but after the dressing down she had given him in the afternoon she wasn't up to it. Then Hardy had dropped off the boat deck and sneered at him.

What a break that had been;

"What are you reading, the Bible?" Hardy snickered.

"My mother's Bible," Mr. Striek had said very quietly.

Hardy scowled at him and crossed the deck to Emilie, who took his arm and started for the gangplank, while Mr. Striek resumed his pontifical pacing under the flat glare of the flooded lights. He heard Emilie gently skinning Hardy alive for making light of Bible reading.

LATER, having enticed Hardy's cat with a few bits of meat pilfered from the galley into Miss Johnson's cabin, he daubed a little sticky collodion from the medicine stores on its feet and left it snarling and yowling for Miss Johnson to find upon her return.

Hardy had been halfway across the boat deck when her terrified shriek

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reached Mr. Striek, who was hidden in the fidley just off the portside alley. He had found her, frightened and excited, outside her door. Above her adjurations not to hurt it, or be hurt, Mr. Striek stalked into the cabin. The place was a shambles of broken glass. The fluffy window curtains the company had put in tc entice passengers were in ribbons.

Hardy's cat, having exhausted its devious cat's imagination trying to rid its feet of the claying collodion, leaped and looped in cross-eyed fury, and finally crouched on a ruined small pillow of soft blue silk glaring with a mad, unfocused stare at the mate. Mr. Striek wasted no time in collaring the beast which, beyond a couple of vicious passes with unsheathed claws, yowling and spitting like a fiend, and a final flying dive for the closed porthole, offered no protest to being gathered by the scruff of its neck into Mr. Striek's huge paw.

"This cat of yours has gone nuts," he said gruffly to Hardy, who reached the door as Mr. Striek came out. "Don't give me any lip." He shut Hardy off. "I'll lock this beast up till we can see if it's got the rabies."

Miss Johnson gasped and paled and shrank away from the cat, which, with the skin of its head drawn slightly back by the generous nature of Mr. Striek's grip, grinned evilly. He'd routed out the steward to put Miss Johnson's room in order, and, having got off in a dark corner with a rag and some alcohol long enough to clean the cat's feet, returned to fuss and fume over Miss Johnson's predicament.

She had been sweetly grateful for his kindness and though she did not mention the affair of the afternoon, Mr. Striek felt that at least she had softened toward him. There was also satisfaction in considering the interest bearing effect of the cat's depredations, for, Mr. Striek knew from bitter experience, by the time Captain Romany Morehouse got through protecting the company from expense, Hardy would have a dent in his pay-off that would look like an excavation for Boulder Dam.

Hardy was as wild as a hyena with the hives; Mr. Striek wagged his head joyfully and filled his lungs with the fresh sea breeze. Life was good. All you had to do was use your head a little.

"Are you watch officer in this vessel or just beatin' your way?" Captain Romany Morehouse, in whose breast Mr. Striek's interrupted gesture of the day before still rankled, inquired politely.

"Aye, sir?" Mr. Striek answered automatically, coming out of his dream.

"If you wouldn't mind losing that silly grin you've had on your face all morning, you might have the log streamed and take over the bridge so I can get me a little nap before breakfast."

"I'll handle her all right," Mr. Striek grinned expansively. "Turn in, sir, if you want to."

"Well, thank you very much, Mr. Striek," Morehouse snorted sarcastically. "Damned nice of you, I'll say." He eyed Mr. Striek belligerently for a second, and, muttering in his throat, went inside.

LATER, Mr. Striek went down to face the ship's mess. Hidden in the toe of an old sea boot under his bunk he knew was the bona fide Bible he had purchased of a leather-faced old Algerian Moslem during a lone and hasty sortie ashore the night

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before. The Moslem had all but flung the dog-eared volume in his face; had suspiciously bitten the coin Mr. Striek had offered in payment; and ended by spitting on Mr. Striek's Christian shoe, an affront which Mr. Striek had promptly wiped out with the back of his hand. The Moslem had tumbled among his gewgaws, and Mr. Striek had vanished among the shadows of the bazaar.

"Smeared some kind of goo on the cat's paw and locked it in her room," Hardy told MacNutt as Mr. Striek slid into his seat at the head of the mess-room table. "Bat-eared waterside scum," he concluded, glaring balefully at the mate.

"'Tis a peety th' arnimul can na talk," MacNutt muttered.

"It seems to me the gift of gab has been spread too freely already," Mr. Striek remarked sweetly.

"You and your owl-eyed Bible reading," Hardy sneered.

"Th' Book—him?" MacNutt's lip wrinkled scornfully.

"I was reading," Mr. Striek murmured, looking MacNutt gently in the eye, "of a man named Balaam, who tied his ass to a tree and left him." MacNutt's steam-cured face darkened alarmingly. "The Book didn't say if he came back for it," Mr. Striek went on. "I been wondering if it could have strayed off to sea."

"Blusspheemur!" MacNutt flared his nostrils like an infuriated war-horse sniffing battle.

The engine room cadet giggled, and MacNutt, forgetting his dignity, caught him under the chin with a hastily flung biscuit and ordered him below to re-case the main steam line with asbestos.

"Twill gie ye a for-r-r-taste ov yer ulteemut doom!" he bellowed.

"Dinna ye ken," Mr. Striek chided him. "A sheep at sea is noo a sarnd-box wie objec's foor-r a bairn to putch aboot."

"An' weel ye gang a-moonin' aboot th' ducks again t'day; wie ye paint pot and narsty luttle whusps ov hair markin' up th' gear, ye lovesick loon?" MacNutt sneered while his face bloomed purple.

Playfully Mr. Striek sprinkled water from his drinking glass on Mr. MacNutt's congested face.

"Of dudly seens thurr-r-r ar-r-re seven," he gibed. "An' angurr—"

Mr. MacNutt dived at Mr. Striek, who slid nimbly out of his chair, leaving the chief engineer more or less face down in a plate of eggs and bacon the mess boy had just put on the table before the mate.

Breakfastless but happy, Mr. Striek abandoned the uproar to shine and polish in his room before resuming the conquest of Emilie Johnson as soon as she should appear on the passenger deck.

MISS JOHNSON was reading a book when Mr. Striek's diffident grin topped the stairs. "I just thought I would take a look around," he said tentatively.

Miss Johnson laid the book down and smiled.

"I was rude yesterday," she said. "I'm sorry."

"Pshaw!" Mr. Striek suddenly felt disarmed and ill at ease. "I forgot myself when that darned cat jumped on me. I didn't really mean to hurt it."

"Afterwards — that's what I thought, afterwards." Miss Johnson's faintly embarrassed smile touched him.

"I'm just a rough sailor, I guess," he muttered modestly. "It's—well, be-

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ing a missionary saving people's souls is different."

A flicker of annoyance upset the placid smoothness of Miss Johnson's face, but it was gone almost as soon as it had appeared.

"My father is the missionary," she informed him gently.

"Yes, ma'am." Mr. Striek curried his face solemnly. "But I guess the holy life kind of gets down through the family. Leastwise it seems that way to me."

"Oh, was your father a missionary, too?"

"My father? My old man was a shipmaster. Pretty crusty old coot, too, they tell me. No, ma'am, he wasn't exactly a missionary. Where'd you get that idea?"

"What you said about the holy life getting into people and saw you reading the Bible last night as I went ashore with Mr. Hardy."

"Oh, yes." Mr. Striek cleared his throat noisily. "Well—well, I do look at the Book now and then." Sudden heat occurred just below his breast bone, spread rapidly to his throat, and dampened his forehead.

He hoped no telltale flush had betrayed him.

"Which of the prophets do you like best?" Miss Johnson's smile had taken on a faint quizzical quality which Mr. Striek found baffling.

"Well, let's see now," he stalled along, trying to remember which was which. His family always gave Biblical names, he remembered that; so there was his three brothers, Matthew and Luke and John, his cousin Hezekiah, and his own name, Absalom. The last two sounded a little bit phony.

"Well, I guess I like John," he said profoundly. "Of course, Matthew and Luke—but I like John."

"The Psalms," Miss Johnson murmured.

"Yes, the Psalms." Mr. Striek eased the pressure of his uniform collar around his neck and wished she would talk about something else. "The Psalms of John," he murmured, nodding pleasant recollection. "Well, I got to get about my duties," he said suddenly, taking refuge in flight as Miss Johnson's clear brown eyes met his.

There was something in her eyes that disconcerted Mr. Striek. They seemed to caress him and to laugh at him and to cut right to a spot on his chest that made him go hot and cold. "I—I—the mate's work's never done," he stuttered.

"Oh, not yet," her eyes pleaded.

"Well, I could stay a few minutes, I guess," he mumbled. "I guess I could."

"The days are so long sitting up here all alone," Miss Johnson sighed. "Mr. Hardy comes up sometimes. Mr. Hardy is nice, don't you think?"

MR. STRIEK smothered an impulse to scuttle Hardy and compromised by frowning judicially. "He's all right," he conceded. "'Course, like all wireless men, he's a little cracked—listening to wireless signals." He explained sympathetically. "They get a permanent buzz in their heads after a while. Makes them a little crazy. Two, I know of, jumped overboard. One of them tried to kill the captain; said the captain had sat on his window sill at night buzzing S O S—S O S on a harmonica."

"How tragic."

"Another chased a long-haired monkey we had for a ship's mascot all over the decks with a butcher knife—he said the monkey had been stealing elec-

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tricity from his dynamo to juice a wireless station hidden in the lazaret. But that's wireless operators for you—nuts all of them."

Mr. Striek brushed them all aside with a single wave of his hand.

"Well! Beauty and the Beast!" Hardy stuck his impish grin above the stairhead.

"Good morning," Miss Johnson greeted him brightly. "I'm sorry you were so upset last night. Is the cat all right today?"

Hardy flashed a venomous sidelong glance at Mr. Striek, who acknowledged it with a slight bow.

"Good morning, my frand," Mr. Striek gibed.

"I just came up to make sure that everything had been put in order for you."

Hardy's eyes doted on Miss Johnson, who in a sport costume of white and gold looked like a lovely and somewhat mischievous angel.

"The Old Man told you the exact extent of the damage your cat did, I suppose." Mr. Striek drove the iron into Hardy with gusto.

"By the way," Hardy went on, ignoring the mate, "I found this in the ship's library." He held up a dog-eared volume of the Seaman's Guide which Mr. Striek recognized at once as his own—the very book he had hidden under his shore clothes in his sea chest! "It's a copy," Hardy went on, while Mr. Striek's mind raced between indignation and horror, "of the Seaman's Guide. Looks like a Bible, doesn't it? Passengers sometimes find interesting information in these books." He handed the volume to Miss Johnson and across her bowed head smirked at Mr. Striek.

"It does look like a Bible," Miss Johnson agreed.

"Especially in a bad light—say a flood light that wasn't hung just right—at a little distance, of course."

MR. STRIEK'S momentary panic had passed. The real Bible, he knew, was in the toe of an old sea boot well hidden under his bunk. He felt that he could stand having Hardy do his worst.

"The way you gawk at me as if I was an Arab stevedore," he challenged bluntly. "I guess you got something you want to say. Out with it. Miss Johnson won't mind, will you, Miss Johnson?"

"Why—no—of course—but it does *look* like a Bible, doesn't it?" She passed the book to Mr. Striek, who turned it idly in his hands. "What kind of a Bible do you have?"

"Yeah," Hardy crowed. "It would not be one like that, now, would it?"

"It's the one I've always had," Mr. Striek retorted with dignity.

"The one you were reading last night, I suppose?" Hardy sniggered. "That Seaman's Guide you paraded around under the flood light."

"You remember what I was telling you, Miss Johnson?" Mr. Striek said confidentially. "About how sitting in a little hot room listening to little dits and dahs all the time tends to drive wireless operators nuts. They get sillier and sillier until at last they're violent. 'Course most of them are such puny specimens it don't make any real difference. Ordinarily I wouldn't pay any more attention to Mr. Hardy—I understand how it is with him—but I'd really like to show you the Bible my mother gave me when I went to sea. I keep it locked up. I wouldn't want it to be lost or"—he paused and glanced deliberately at Hardy—"stolen."

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"I'm sure I'd be entranced," Miss Johnson said dubiously.

"I'll be back in a minute," Mr. Striek assured her. "While I am gone get Mr. Hardy to tell you how, single-handed, he brought the bark Lulu into port when the captain and crew were stricken deaf and dumb by Mr. Hardy's straightforward account of the time he found the North Star out of place and put it back."

The larger freckles on Hardy's angrily swelling neck were standing out like Mexican jumping beans.

Mr. Striek felt fine. He chuckled all the way to his room and was still chuckling when he thrust his hand into the leg of the sea boot. Abruptly his chuckle ceased. An icy hand closed on his heart and his throat constricted. He gasped.

The Bible was not there! The rat! The wiggling little sea slug! Hardy had taken it with the Seaman's Guide! Stolen both of them while he had been wool gathering on the passenger deck. He might have known. Self-rebuke drowned him in a sea of misery from which he emerged to face the problem of facing Miss Emilie Johnson. He imagined the look of pain and disappointment that would come to her eye and the raucous laughter of that shrimp.

THROUGH long minutes when the fire of his spirit shrank until it was no more than fitful flickers, Mr. Striek sat on the deck beside the salt-crusted sea boot which had failed him. In all the world there was no grain of comfort unless—a feeble gleam of hope shone in the gloom of his despondency. Perhaps if he confessed everything — flung himself on her mercy—told her he had lied because he wanted her to think well of him—because he was mad with love for her. That Hardy was only playing—fooling her to spite him. Perhaps his plea would touch her—his desperate devotion make her kind. It was a chance—the only chance.

Mr. Striek scrambled to his feet and dashed for the passenger deck. He clattered up the steps and burst on to the deck with his speech hot on his lips.

Fate struck him flat! The deck was empty, and Hardy's derisive voice escaped from Captain Romany Morehouse's shuttered cabin.

"Reading the Seaman's Guide, he was," the wireless operator was chortling. "He never owned a Bible in his life unless he bought one last night when he went ashore. Yeah, the Arab watchman told me he went ashore after Miss Johnson and I had gone. The Bible!" he cried scornfully. "After being caught in the act of trying to brain my cat he wanted Miss Johnson to think he was a churchgoing saint—a *plaster* saint, he is."

Mr. Striek balled up his fists and started forward. Already he could imagine Hardy's lying red neck reposing within the efficient circle of his own ten good fingers. By Crimus, he'd choke the truth out of him! The heavy guffaw of Captain Romany Morehouse swelled as he reached the door and Hardy's hateful chuckle rattled above it. Then Mr. Striek stopped stock still, for underlying the loud laughter of the two men a faint melodious giggle reached his ears. Miss Emilie Johnson was laughing at him, too.

A red-hot arrow drove straight to Mr. Striek's heart. In silence he gripped his teeth together and then chewed his lip until blood flowed in a fine dark line over his chin.

At last he turned away. The sun

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was hot, and the Sirocco carried the Sahara's heat far out over the sea; yet, Mr. Striek, easing himself heavily down the ladder, shivered and his big hand, when it moved to shift a grip on the handrail, trembled.

BEHIND the barricaded door of his room Mr. Striek flung himself face down on his bunk. For a time it seemed that earth and water had slipped from beneath his stumbling feet; that he lay friendless and alone in a great void. Then he lost his temper and raged around his room like a caged animal. Exhausted at last, he plumped himself down on the bunk and forgave everybody. Even when Hardy, reverting to an old means of bedeviling him, started his tiny phonograph to playing, over and over, a doleful tenor wail called "Star of the Sea," Mr. Striek did not rise to this ridiculing of his Christian name of Arcturus.

"Star of the Sea" . . .

The reedy tenor tweedled.

Later the purling meow of Hardy's cat outside his door stirred him. Mr. Striek suspected the cat had been enticed there by a judicious smearing of the threshold with fish. Without rancor he opened the door a crack and dumped a packet of catnip purchased at Algiers, to debauch the animal, in the alley outside.

The moral degeneration of Hardy's cat no longer appealed to him, but from the depths of his suffering he sensed a bond with the victim of a parental indiscretion which had condemned the beast to a cock-eyed life. Out of the deep sympathy born of suffering without benefit of whisky or hashish Mr. Striek provided Hardy's cat with the means of forgetting its affliction in a rose-tinted catnip bender.

Later he stood his watch in melancholy silence and found an allegory in the blood-red sun and the thick clouds reaching darkly to engulf it. The spectacle of Hardy's cat alternately sliding on its nose with ecstatic mewlings and dashing madly about the decks did not rouse him. He successfully avoided Emilie Johnson and, when his watch was over, went aft to the Lebanon's poop and gave himself up to the silence, and the tragedy of his love.

The North African moon arose, a maddening yellow curve from the sea rim, and, mounting swiftly, its broad track changing from gold to silver, hung at last, incandescent, melancholy and still, above the heaving bulk of the ship. Against the dark loom of the near-by coast the lights of Oran glimmered like fireflies.

Abetted in his melancholy by the sorry face in the moon, Mr. Striek had enjoyed an unknown number of minutes of self-inflicted purgatory before a commotion, a series of faint sounds which might have been made by members of the crew scuffling and laughing in the dark forward somewhere, reached him.

In Mr. Striek's overheated imagination the sounds were undoubtedly made by Hardy and the rest rehashing his humiliation while an ever widening circle led by Miss Johnson were amused. Mr. Striek bitterly considered the Lebanon's swirling wake which wound from directly beneath him in a sort of watery Milky Way into the misty reaches of the moonlight.

Abruptly his mood was shattered by the voice of the youthful deck cadet hysterically calling his name.

"What the hell's eating you?" Mr. Striek bawled gracelessly.

The cadet whimpered and galloped across the after well deck to be met

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by the mate, who dropped from the poop like a plummet.

"Let's have it," he snapped, shaking the cadet into sudden and complete sanity.

"The blacks—the stowaways—" the cadet panted.

"Put it on the line," Mr. Striek snarled.

"Broke out—broke out—the passenger deck—"

A CURSE rumbled in Mr. Striek's throat and he flung the cadet aside. At the top of the main deck ladder he caught up a tie bolt abandoned by a careless member of the crew, and weighed it in his big fist.

This was no job for heavy weapons. A tie bolt, now, was light and hard and not too long for close work.

A scream of terror set a fearful rage boiling in the mate. If they had hurt Miss Emilie Johnson, he would skin them like a couple of river mullet; he would flay them alive. Another second and he had passed the 'midship winch and, without bothering to reach the passenger deck by way of the ladder, tucked the tie bolt into his waistband and, with a prodigious leap, caught the pipe rail of the passenger deck and swung up.

There is an old Scottish tale to the effect that, when Douglas was laying siege to the castles of his foemen, fond mothers frightened their recalcitrant children by telling them that the Douglas, claymore in hand, might at any moment swarm over the castle wall and do them in.

Miss Emilie Johnson may never have heard this tale. But that Mr. MacNutt had heard it is certain. So when Mr. Striek loomed dark and sudden, the tie bolt in his fist, above the rail, Miss Johnson shrank with a whimper into the corner where MacNutt had flung her for safety.

MacNutt, with his eyes starting from his head at the apparition rising, as it were, from the sea to top the pipe rail, so far forgot himself as to open his mouth to speak and to lower the two-foot monkey wrench he was on the point of hurling at the head of a hulking black stowaway. The stowaway brandished a foot and half springleaf in the direction of MacNutt while his compatriot stooped toward the wobbling figure of Wireless Operator Hardy.

Mr. Striek noted with satisfaction that the stowaway had uncorked a marline-spike haymaker that was already laying Mr. Hardy cold beside the slack bulk of Captain Romany Morehouse. The spectacle of Hardy knocked silly by a rat from the Tunis water front appealed to Mr. Striek; but the sight of Miss Emilie Johnson flung into the scuppers like an old shoe turned his hot blood to ice.

In utter silence Mr. Striek set his foot on the rail and dropped to the deck before her like a cat. The man who had laid Hardy out shifted the marline-spike to his left hand and his right snapped sharply forward. In a quick fade-away Mr. Striek felt the thrown knife fan his shoulder, and he swerved toward the broad forward rail intending to jam the fellow into the angle of the deckhouse where he would barely have room to turn, let alone perform with the marline-spike.

And then a yowling hellion raked Mr. Striek's forearm. Involuntarily he sprang away from the rail and slightly toward the stowaway, who promptly shuffled forward to meet him. Mr. Striek swore a salty oath and made a swipe at Hardy's cat, which leaped off the rail and dashed yowling in catnip-

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induced delirium 'round and 'round the deck.

The black with the spring-leaf, having no sympathy for MacNutt's preoccupation, belted the Scot's head with the weapon, and the chief engineer, abruptly becoming bored with the whole affair, sank like a tired burro to the deck.

The two blacks squared off, and Mr. Striek with Miss Johnson in the corner behind him and the tie bolt jutting from his fist, faced them alone.

"Y'Allah il Allah. Yai Allah!" the blacks screamed fanatically, recognizing their foe of a few days back.

"Lay forward, you crummy sons of Ham," Mr. Striek gritted.

"Y'Allah il Allah!" they retorted with the cry that had been old when Crusaders, with their pots and pans, had searched for the Holy Grail. Mr. Striek knew little enough of Crusaders, but he knew plenty about dockside scrapings of the North African coast. Besides, hadn't he already knocked this pair into the middle of the foregoing week just after the ship had cleared Bizert?

Mr. Striek did not enjoy this reflection on his efficiency.

"Belay!" he bawled, starting for them.

HARDY'S cat, skidding in a scratching flurry of claws on its third seething circuit of the deck, careened with a demoniac wail off Mr. Striek's left leg; landed in a heap in the scuppers below the side rail, and, scrambling to his feet, leaped wildly to the broad front rail as Mr. Striek and his opponents moved toward each other. The cat scarcely paused in its uninhibited enjoyment of complete release and dived with a spitting howl straight at Mr. Striek. That worthy warrior dropped to his knees and the cat, sailing in furious abandon over him, landed on the chest of the black with the marline-spike, and went to work.

The unencumbered black dashed at Mr. Striek, whirling the spring-leaf murderously above his head. Mr. Striek went into a sort of frozen-legged crouch and met the yelling Moslem head on. The spring-leaf whirled out of its over-the-head gyration and slashed like a scimitar at Mr. Striek's head and shoulders.

It was then that Mr. Striek did a curious sort of darting pivot that carried under the attacker's arm and, when the spring-leaf flashed through the spot where Mr. Striek's head had been a bare half second before, the mate was straightening up behind his opponent on a quartering course with the man's shoulder.

Mr. Striek paused a fraction of a second and then, like a finished golfer who makes a perfect stroke with the minimum of fiddling and fussing, batted his opponent efficiently behind the ear with the tie bolt, and the man fell like a dropped sack of coal.

Hardy's cat slithered across the deck at his feet and dived into a corner, where it rolled over and over with shrill yelps of insensate glee. Its recent victim flung up his marline-spike and despite the scarifications of cat's claws marking him from head to waist, charged Mr. Striek with a will.

Mr. Striek snatched a glance at Miss Johnson to find her kneeling with her back to the rail and her two fists clenched at the level of her shoulders. He had hardly time to wonder what kind of an attitude that was for the daughter of a missionary, when the men with the marline-spike was upon him.

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Mr. Striek deftly avoided the man's stroke and wondered where in the name of ten thousand furies the crew had got to.

The stowaway weaved in again and Mr. Striek, seeking an opening, was forced to catch another blow on the upswing of his tie bolt.

And then the deck cadet, having gathered a few hands, swarmed up the ladder and let fly a chain shackle at the head of the stowaway. His intentions were laudable, but his aim was poor, and the chain shackle, missing its goal entirely, side-swiped Mr. Striek, who plunged like a half ton of bricks into the scuppers. The cadet froze in horror with the crew massed dumbly behind him.

The stowaway, seeing only an advantage to himself, swung the marlinespike for a final settling of accounts with the thrice accursed dog of a Christian.

Then, startling them all, a hollow *bolp* sounded, and there stood Miss Emilie Johnson, the spring-leaf sagging in her hands and tears streaming from her eyes, over the slack heap of the black.

"Ooh you!—You darn—you—!" she sobbed furiously, and then the heavy spring-leaf dragged free of her unaccustomed hands and banged against the deck. The sound brought the deck cadet to life, and he charged from the stairhead while Miss Emilie Johnson, sobbing, Heaven knows what, tugged at Mr. Striek's big shoulder, which was rather coyly turned from her.

"THAT blasted cat," Mr. Striek grumbled from his bed of pain next morning. "Cock-eyed as the devil and rolling over and over in the corner like a locoed jack rabbit. It ain't natural."

"Mr. Hardy says we can have it for our house at Marrakeesh," Miss Johnson announced happily. "Now don't thrash around or you'll displace the bandage on your head."

"Mr. Hardy and that cat are a good pair," Mr. Striek horse-laughed loudly. "Daffy, both of them. I won't have that cat anywhere near me, and that's final."

"Mr. MacNutt is going to give us a nice collar with a bell for him," Miss Johnson rambled on heedlessly. "Please lie still. How do you ever expect to get over that awful bump?"

"He'd better tie it around his own neck, the damn—danged old donkey bell-wether," Mr. Striek retorted, adding a bellicose grunt for good measure.

"And Captain Romany Morehouse—"

"Fuddy-duddy, that's what he is. A blasted Fuddy-duddy. Haw!" Mr. Striek exploded cryptically.

"Oh, Arcturus, darling, doesn't anything please you?" Miss Johnson knelt by the side of his bunk and sighed.

Mr. Striek grinned broadly and squirmed beneath the sheets.

"I was just thinking—" His eyes sought hers and he scowled, but his big hand trembled against the bed covers. "Look, Emilie—"

"You great child." She drew his bandaged head against her breast and kissed his ear.

"I suppose," he grumbled darkly, "if we must have a cat it might as well be *that* cock-eyed scramble-wit. Crimus! You should have seen him tear into that stowaway."

"I did, Zany!" Miss Johnson whispered.

THE END

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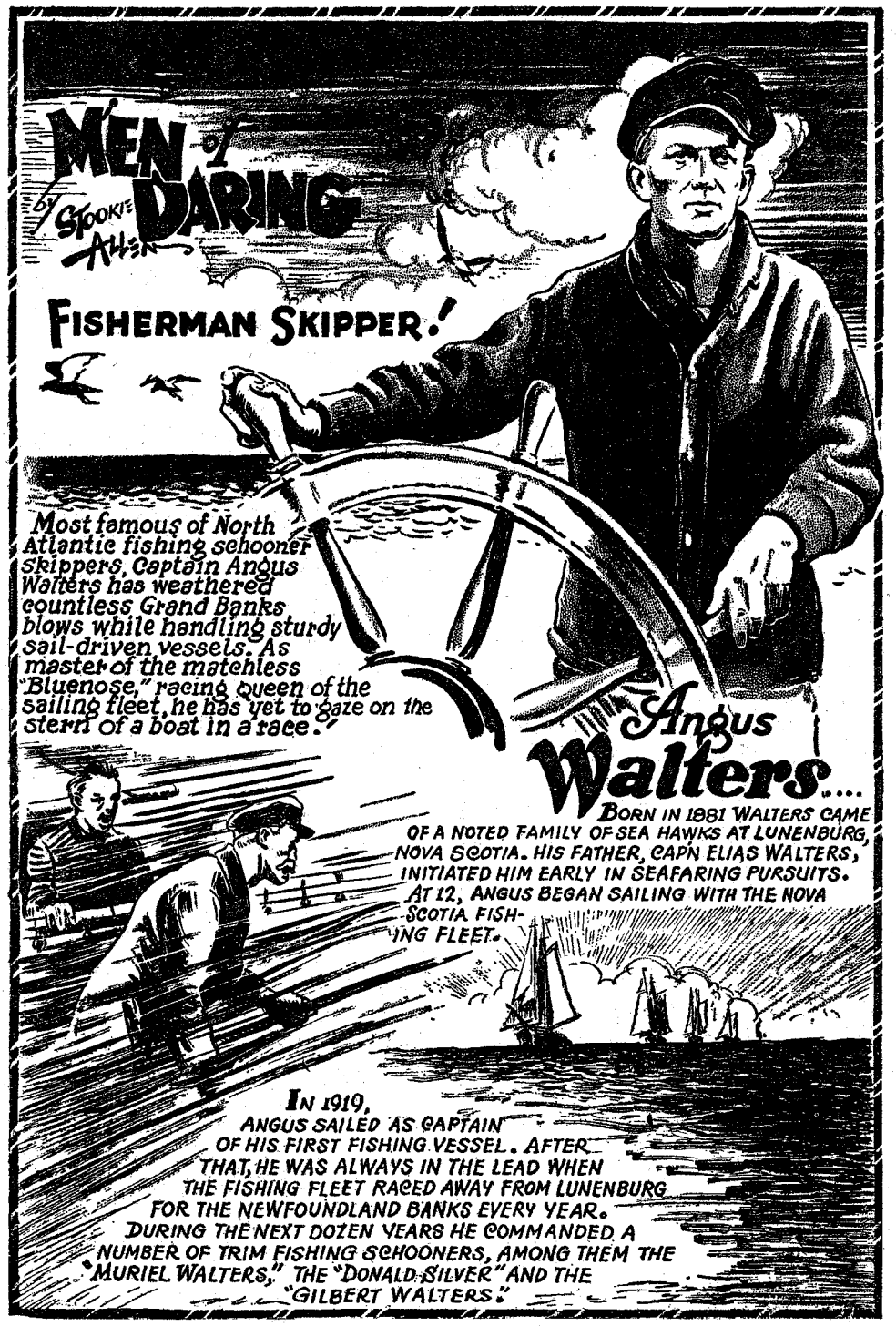
MEN of DARING
By Spooner Allen
FISHERMAN SKIPPER!
Most famous of North Atlantic fishing schooner skippers, Captain Angus Walters has weathered countless Grand Banks blows while handling sturdy sail-driven vessels. As master of the matchless "Bluenose," racing queen of the sailing fleet, he has yet to gaze on the stern of a boat in a race.
Angus Walters....
BORN IN 1881 WALTERS CAME OF A NOTED FAMILY OF SEA HAWKS AT LUNENBURG, NOVA SCOTIA. HIS FATHER, CAPN ELIAS WALTERS, INITIATED HIM EARLY IN SEAFARING PURSUITS. AT 12, ANGUS BEGAN SAILING WITH THE NOVA SCOTIA FISHING FLEET.
IN 1919, ANGUS SAILED AS CAPTAIN OF HIS FIRST FISHING VESSEL. AFTER THAT, HE WAS ALWAYS IN THE LEAD WHEN THE FISHING FLEET RACED AWAY FROM LUNENBURG FOR THE NEWFOUNDLAND BANKS EVERY YEAR. DURING THE NEXT DOZEN YEARS HE COMMANDED A NUMBER OF TRIM FISHING SCHOONERS, AMONG THEM THE "MURIEL WALTERS," THE "DONALD SILVER" AND THE "GILBERT WALTERS."

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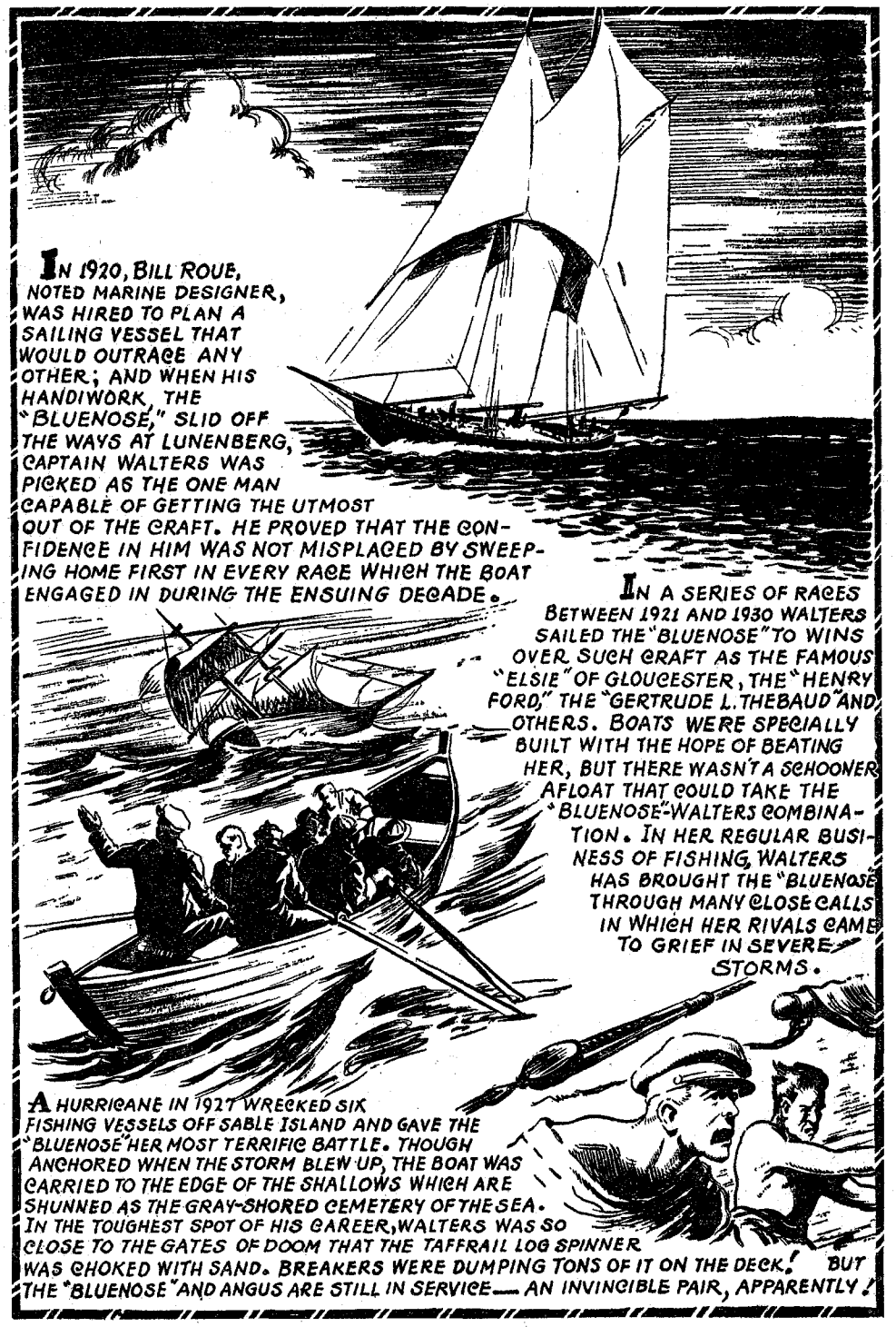
IN 1920, BILL ROUE, NOTED MARINE DESIGNER, WAS HIRED TO PLAN A SAILING VESSEL THAT WOULD OUTRACE ANY OTHER; AND WHEN HIS HANDIWORK, THE "BLUENOSE," SLID OFF THE WAYS AT LUNENBERG, CAPTAIN WALTERS WAS PICKED AS THE ONE MAN CAPABLE OF GETTING THE UTMOST OUT OF THE CRAFT. HE PROVED THAT THE CONFIDENCE IN HIM WAS NOT MISPLACED BY SWEEPING HOME FIRST IN EVERY RACE WHICH THE BOAT ENGAGED IN DURING THE ENSUING DECADE.
IN A SERIES OF RACES BETWEEN 1921 AND 1930 WALTERS SAILED THE "BLUENOSE" TO WINS OVER SUCH CRAFT AS THE FAMOUS "ELSIE" OF GLOUCESTER, THE "HENRY FORD," THE "GERTRUDE L. THEBAUD" AND OTHERS. BOATS WERE SPECIALLY BUILT WITH THE HOPE OF BEATING HER, BUT THERE WASN'T A SCHOONER AFLOAT THAT COULD TAKE THE "BLUENOSE"-WALTERS COMBINATION. IN HER REGULAR BUSINESS OF FISHING, WALTERS HAS BROUGHT THE "BLUENOSE" THROUGH MANY CLOSE CALLS IN WHICH HER RIVALS CAME TO GRIEF IN SEVERE STORMS.
A HURRICANE IN 1927 WRECKED SIX FISHING VESSELS OFF SABLE ISLAND AND GAVE THE "BLUENOSE" HER MOST TERRIFIC BATTLE. THOUGH ANCHORED WHEN THE STORM BLEW UP, THE BOAT WAS CARRIED TO THE EDGE OF THE SHALLOWS WHICH ARE SHUNNED AS THE GRAY-SHORED CEMETERY OF THE SEA. IN THE TOUGHEST SPOT OF HIS CAREER, WALTERS WAS SO CLOSE TO THE GATES OF DOOM THAT THE TAFFRAIL LOG SPINNER WAS CHOKED WITH SAND. BREAKERS WERE DUMPING TONS OF IT ON THE DECK! BUT THE "BLUENOSE" AND ANGUS ARE STILL IN SERVICE — AN INVINCIBLE PAIR, APPARENTLY!

Next Week: Casey Jones, Birdman

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Tim slipped over a punch that dropped Kwaist

Silver Thaw

By FRANK R. PIERCE

Tim Donovan was fighting men as well as nature to get out his Northwest logs—even his father had turned against him

LEADING UP TO THIS INSTALLMENT

"CYCLONE" DONOVAN, Northwest logger, was trapped in a forest fire when he saw a mother cougar making a difficult decision. She had two cubs, and could save only one. The one that snarled defiantly at the flames she left to take care of itself. When Cyclone got out of the fire he made a similar decision regarding his two sons, Bud and Tim.

Cyclone knew that some day he must turn his valuable holdings over to one of his sons, and he wanted the strongest one to have charge of them. Bud he pampered, Tim was forced to fight for himself.

A silver thaw broke down much of the timber, twenty years later, that had been willed to the boys by their mother. It was Bud's timber that received consideration from Cyclone. Tim started out to log his on his own.

In a saloon fight, Tim knocked out and thought he had killed Chris Nord, Cyclone's woods boss. Suffering from the effects of the fight, Tim was helped away

This story began in the Argosy for August 24

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by old Kentucky Logan, and finally found refuge in the home of the Overtons, traditional enemies of the Donovans, where Ruth Overton nursed him.

CHAPTER VII *(Continued)*.

MELLOWED.

THERE followed for Tim Donovan nights of blackness when he groped for moorings and invariably found Ruth Overton's steadying hand. There were days when she bent over him and he endowed her with the attributes of an angel. Once a doctor was brought in, blindfolded, to remain a day. He left at night, blindfolded. He worked hard that day and left them with hope in their hearts.

When Tim's mind finally cleared, the Overtons knew that a supposed clot had properly dissolved and the patient was on the upgrade.

"What's the date?" he asked.

She told him, and he shook his head. "I've lost a lot of valuable time," he complained. "Has the sheriff been prowling around?"

"No. Here's one place he wouldn't look," Ruth said.

"What's the news from Mill City?" Tim inquired.

"None," the girl told him. "Pap and the boys have been burning brush in the down-timber area. It's safe, during the wet season. Next summer it'll be dynamite."

Tim was sitting at the table with the Overtons two days later. The nerves of all were tense, as the boys were slow to swallow their resentment. Ruth smoothed things over and was ably backed by Pap. There was nothing approaching an outburst.

Tim was ready to leave the third day he was up.

"I've imposed on you enough, Ruth," he said. "I'm now in your debt, plenty."

Pap, passing the porch where they were sitting watching the sunset, signaled the girl to take advantage of this opening. Once out of sight he rounded up the boys.

"He's full of gratitude," he said excitedly, "and if I can just get him full o' that corn likker I made ten years ago he should herd like a sheep."

He brought out a jug and stalked onto the porch. "I've been thinkin', Tim," he said, "if suthin' like this could've happened fifteen years ago, Cyclone and me might've made a deal whereby he'd got his power site and I'd got my logs off. On acquaintance you Donovans ain't so bad.

"I never thought I'd bring myself to drink with a Donovan," Pap shrewdly continued, "but then you ain't old Cyclone." He poured a generous drink into two glasses. "Here's to keepin' two jumps ahead of the sheriff," he suggested.

"Thanks, Mr. Overton," Tim replied, standing up. They gulped down the moonshine. "Ah! That's pretty smooth stuff. Even Kentucky Logan would approve."

"Now you've said the wrong thing, Tim," Ruth exclaimed. "Pap and Kentucky are always quarreling over the proper method of distilling liquor."

"I've offered to learn him the right way; offered to show him the tricks, but he's too danged stubborn. Here's one now to gittin' your logs to somebody's mill pond," Pap offered.

"Down the old hatch!" Tim answered. "Ulp! Very smooth!"

THERE followed a drink to the success of the new still Pap was building; and a fourth drink to Ruth's success as a nurse.

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"Bes' li'l nurse a man ever had," Tim said. "Ulp! Say...say...Mr. Overton..."

"Call me Pap, Tim," Overton interrupted.

"Say...say...Pap, you know we Donovans are three-bottle men when it comes...ulp...to drinking. My old man is the best damn drinker in the... ulp...State of Washington," Tim declared.

"Huh!" Pap scowled. "He ain't even deservin' of hon—hon—honorable mention when it comes to . . . two-handed drinkers. I propose a drink to the...ulp...a drink to the drinks Cyclone couldn't handle."

"Pap, as man to man, I ask to be 'scused from this last drink. I don't seem to be...ulp...not ulp, but up to it, since my sickness. One more drink and that timber will log itself."

"Jus' as I said, the Donovans ain't mentioned, even in a low...ulp... breath when drinkin' men are dis— What's the word, Ruthie?" he asked.

"Discussed," she said.

"Discussed," Pap repeated.

Whereupon Tim took one more and sat down in a fog. Pap walked around the house and saw the chopping block. His knees were buckling and the block looked like a cushioned chair. He sat down forthwith. Klone picked up the jug.

"You emptied it! No wonder you're all in, Pap," he said. "Is Tim out?"

"Tim's as meller as a harvest moon," Pap declared.

TIM said nothing for a long time. He was amazed to find how satisfying it was to sit in silence with a girl; particularly when the girl, a former and possibly present enemy, had proved a stout crutch in need. He licked his lips several times, then began speaking, selecting his words with care. "You sure worked wonders in me, Ruth."

He was proud of the first sentence, as it was free of alcoholic thickness. "You know, Ruth, you Overtons are not a bit like what I thought you would be. Fine, warm-hearted people. You could have made my stay unpleasant. The boys might have busted me one on the jaw for luck."

She smiled. Tim would never realize the difficulty she had experienced in quieting her brothers. She regarded him critically and said, "We're in the same boat, Tim. About the down timber, I mean."

"We're in a tough spot," he agreed. "But I'll get out of it."

"And I suppose we will, too."

"If I can help—" he began, checked himself, then plunged on. "And I can help, but naturally the boys won't throw in with a Donovan."

"Tim!" she exclaimed. "You're unfair. Offering hope this way. You see, Tim, I have so much faith in your ability to win out. And it seemed to me, for a moment—something in your voice included the Overtons in your plans."

Ruth Overton waited breathlessly for his answer. "I included the Overtons, if they want to be included," he said. "You said we're all in the same boat. But you'll have to whip your brothers into line."

"Tim, let's settle this thing right now—if it can be settled."

She hurried off to find the boys. On the way she slapped Pap in the face with a cold, wet towel.

"We're about to make a deal," she whispered.

The stinging towel and Ruth's words sobered Pap to some extent. "This'll be a great hour for me. I win Cyclone's

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son to my side and get my trees took care of at the same time."

Within five minutes a solemn procession of Overtons moved toward the man on the porch.

"What's the proposition, Tim?" Pap demanded.

"We stick together and quit fighting until our timber's logged," Tim offered.

"It's a deal, and we'll put it in writin' if you say so," said Pap.

"We're not Gaspards, Pap, so no writing is necessary," Tim replied. "Here's my hand."

When the handshaking was completed Pap produced another jug. "We'd better seal this here deal with a drink; how about it, Tim?"

"I'll do my best, Pap," Tim answered.

CHAPTER VIII.

STRANGE NEWS.

"IT'S ag'in' my religious convictions to do hard work," Pap informed Tim the following morning, "but it looks like we'd better start in buckin' that down stuff." He paused, and then suggested hopefully, "Or had we better wait until we learn if the Tracy contract is awarded to us?"

"The timber's got to be logged this year whether we get the contract or not," Tim replied; "but we won't start bucking just yet."

"What'll we do, then?"

"Tonight we'll try to put one over on Cyclone Donovan," Tim answered. "It's a job for all of us. We could use a few CCC men..."

"Hell, them wood ticks ain't no good," Pap grumbled.

"They're plenty good," Tim retorted, "and we'll use a whole company of them before we're through. Now, here's the plan." Briefly he outlined what was expected of each man. "You be at the Donovan roundhouse at Mill City tonight at ten o'clock," he concluded. "I'll have things arranged."

"If you ain't in jail," Pap suggested.

"I'll keep out of the skookum house," Tim promised.

An hour later he was swinging through the down timber toward Deuce Creek. Once in the lower country, he stuck to game trails and avoided possible man-hunters. Smoke trailed lazily from Kentucky Logan's cabin, but a guarded shout brought no answer.

Tim followed a little-used trail to a stream and came to a stop near a fall. A fair-sized creek plunged fifty feet over a granite cliff. Tim took a deep breath and plunged through the mist at the outer edge. He found himself behind the falls and facing a cave the action of water and boulders had ground out.

The cave entrance had been closed with a concrete wall, studded with boulders. An iron door had been fitted into the wall, and without knocking Tim turned the knob and entered. Water, flowing through a cleverly concealed waterwheel, turned a generator which supplied light and electric heat to the cave.

A FINE still was in operation, and Kentucky Logan, Bible on his lap, was reading, smoking, and keeping a paternal eye on the still.

"I knew it was you, Tim," he said, "because you're the only cuss I've told about this location in recent years. How're you feelin' these days?"

"Okay, but weak," Tim answered. "What's the situation?"

"I've got the damnedest, all-fired

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strangest news you ever heard," Kentucky answered. "Nobody's been able to find Nord's body."

"What?"

"I knew that'd curl your hair," Kentucky observed. "But it's the truth."

"But—"

"Go ahead and stutter," Kentucky said. "Everybody else is. In fact, nobody but us two, and the party that spirited off the body, knows Nord's dead. The sheriff and plenty of others *think* you killed him, but they don't *know.*"

"He didn't get up and walk off; that's certain," Tim stated, puzzled.

"But it has this advantage," Kentucky shrewdly pointed out. "A man can't be tried for murder until the body's been found. They may hold you on suspicion, but they can't try you."

"What do dad and Bud think about it?"

"The old man is saying nothing, as usual, and I've never been able to figure Bud out," Kentucky replied. "The old man has had his troubles since he lost his bodyguard."

"People with grudges choose him, eh?"

Kentucky grinned. "He ain't been knocked off his feet yet. Offhand he's had to lay out a half dozen. Bud's leavin' Tuesday to bid on that Tracy contract," the mountaineer concluded.

"And I'll leave Thursday on a plane," Tim said. "I've made temporary peace with the Overtons."

"Good! And you pretty near had to," Kentucky added, "if you expected to get anywhere in that country."

"I feel mean about it, though," Tim admitted. "We had a few drinks which mellowed the old man; then Ruth and I got chummy. Of course I'd never fall in love with her. But she's a swell, scrappy little trick, and I think a lot of her. We kind of got confidential, and I let on I wanted to do something for her—which is God's truth—and..."

"You agreed to get the Overton logs out?" Kentucky interrupted. "You darned fraud." He was grinning.

"That's about the size of it," Tim admitted. "She softened up Pap and the boys, so all's hunky-dory. And I feel sneaking putting one over on them. But...what the hell?"

Tim remained with Kentucky until dusk, then he started for Mill City, pondering on Nord's disappearance. Now that the heat of battle was over, he was sorry for the Swede, though the man had made himself obnoxious from the first.

"But it gives me a lease on life," he concluded as he stopped on the fringe of Mill City and looked down. "Until there's a body there can be no murder trial."

AT the Loggers' Supplies yard Tim found the manager had loaded everything onto two flat cars. The equipment was ready to move. Tim walked a quarter of a mile to the Donovan roundhouse and sized up the situation there. A locomotive had just returned from a brief trip. Steam was up and the engineer was down at the cook house eating.

The Overtons began drifting out of shadows and asking for orders.

"Klone, throw that switch," Tim directed in a low voice; "the others pile onto the tender. And say, Mox, toss on that bundle of pick handles. The Irish in me regards them highly for free-for-alls."

Tim had driven the big locomotive scores of times and it moved out of

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the roundhouse puffing contentedly. No one appeared as they picked up the two flat cars and began rolling easily from town.

"This is easier'n shooting fish in a barrel," Klone said.

"Too easy if you ask me," Tim replied. "Keep your eyes open. And say, just for luck, get up steam in that donkey. We may want to snake it off the flat and up Deuce Creek in a hurry. The old man isn't going to take this lying down."

Two miles from Mill City Tim suddenly used the air. Sparks flew from the rails and the train stopped. A tree lay across the rails. The locomotive headlight revealed an expert faller had purposely dropped it there.

"We're blocked!" Tim yelled. "Listen!"

Behind them came the ring of a hammer against a faller's wedge. "They're dropping a tree behind us," Klone bellowed. "We're trapped!"

Tim opened the throttle, hoping to beat the tree and escape the trap, but a leather-lunged, "Timber-r-r-r!" warned that the tree was going. It crashed with a deep boom, then Cyclone's triumphant voice bellowed, "We've got 'em, boys. The next move is theirs."

"You thought two jumps ahead, as usual, Cyclone," a logger responded.

"Just a matter of patience," Cyclone replied in a voice so loud it was obviously for Tim's benefit. "He *had* to do this—it's the only way he can get his outfit on the job."

Tim backed to the rear tree. It blocked the road completely. "Get those pick handles," he said, "and follow me!" He threw a heavy block over his shoulder, carried several short lengths of steel rope in his hand, and jumped into the brush. Three Overtons remained on guard in the locomotive. Tim reached a convenient tree, threw the wire around it and secured the block before Cyclone realized what he was doing.

"Keep 'em away from that block, boys," he bellowed.

While the loggers rushed the spot, Tim and Klone raced back, got hold of one of the lines on the donkey drum, and ran back. Pick handles and fists were flying. Each paused to get in a few good licks, then Tim rove the line through the block, and with Klone's aid carried it to the obstructing tree. He took several turns around the trunk and then jumped up to the donkey engine. Steam was spurting from the exhaust as he opened the throttle and took up the slack.

"Get a hose, Klone," he yelled, "and hook to a hot water pipe on the locomotive. Be careful you don't scald yourself. Turn it on any man who comes within reach. All right, Pap! Get aboard!"

CYCLONE'S men, running forward with the intention of cutting the line, fell back. Hot water was spraying everything in the vicinity.

"Don't let 'em get away with this," Cyclone roared. "I want that outfit."

Tim's answer was to open the throttle wide. The donkey slowed down until the exhaust became spasmodic bursts, then the tree began to move. "I hope they lashed this yarder's skids to the car plenty tight," Tim muttered.

"She's slippin' some," Pap said.

The entire car was shaking under the pressure, but Tim never let up. He waved the others back out of danger and let the flat car groan.

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His father's voice came from a nearby thicket. "He'll break that car's back. The flat ain't built that can stand such a load."

The tree began to move, an inch at a time, across the track. Five feet, then ten. Fifteen. Twenty. Then thirty feet. The butt swung clear and Tim cut the wire, then scrambled over the equipment to the locomotive.

"Keep them off with the hot water, Pap," he yelled. "We're in the clear."

"In the clear, but licked, boy!" Cyclone's voice taunted. "And you'll be licked until you get that outfit on the job."

Tim knew his father and appreciated he was enjoying the situation to the utmost. He returned to Mill City and spotted the cars on the wharf.

"The sheriff's liable to be on my neck any minute, Pap," he said hastily. "To hold me for investigation would be a sweet way of keeping me out of this timber war. This is your job, Pap. Buy a scow, load everything aboard, and lash it down for rough weather. Charter a tug and have it towed to Scow Bay."

"That's on the ocean!" Klone exclaimed.

"Yes. The mouth of the Skookum River," Tim replied. "The only way we can get our equipment on the job is to *line* scow up the river."

"Through Hell-Roaring Canyon!" Seven of the ten Overtons spoke at once. It sounded like a male chorus.

"Through Hell-Roaring Canyon," Tim replied, climbing into the locomotive cab. "I'm returning this to the roundhouse, then taking a bus for Portland. I'll catch a southbound plane there. They might be watching for me in Seattle. S'long. See you at Scow Bay in a week or ten days. And say, better include a few cases of powder, caps and steel in the equipment. I've got a hunch we're going to do a little hard rock drilling."

He opened the throttle gently and rolled toward the roundhouse.

CHAPTER IX.

THE NEXT MOVE.

"A NICE little set-to," Cyclone observed as he returned with his men on a speeder. "I knew he would try to pull something like that sooner or later. It was the only thing he could do. The chump never will know we left that engine in the roundhouse with the steam up so he'd walk right into it. But we shouldn't have let him get away." He shook his head. "Tim's still got his outfit."

When Cyclone arrived at Mill City he noticed a light burning in the office. He looked in and found Bud Donovan humped over a desk. Except for the scars and battered nose, Bud was a duplicate of his father, though somewhat lighter. It was this likeness, some claimed, that influenced Cyclone to give Bud the best of everything. The fact a cougar's choice of her kittens during a fire affected his decision was beginning to be termed a legend.

"I suppose Tim walked into your trap," Bud said, looking up from a sheet of figures.

"In—and out again," Cyclone answered. "Now we've got to plan the next move. Was anybody in while I was gone?"

"Sheriff! He doesn't know what to think about Nord's disappearance. He's searched the bay; questioned at least a hundred men who were in town that night; he spent a day in the CCC camp and got them to comb the woods

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for signs of a newly made grave and the net result is nothing" Bud replied.

"Got them figures worked up yet?" Cyclone asked.

"Yes. This is what it'll cost to build a spur to my down timber," Bud answered. "And this is the cost of the same timber laid down on Tracy's wharf in California. The idea, I suppose, is to beat Tim and not try to make any money?"

"Beating Tim out of that contract is going to be easy," Cyclone predicted.

"Yes, but if we under-bid him too much there'll be no profit," Bud argued. "And we don't know what kind of a price he'll make. With him it's any old port in a storm. And he's in a sure enough storm."

"Harken to your old man who's been through the mill," Cyclone answered, "and I'll show you a trick with a hole in it. Tracy's got a secretary so old-fashioned he still argues airplanes will never be successful. His name's Skinner. Skinner still uses a letter press instead of carbons for copies of important letters."

"I know the rest of the set-up," Bud said, grinning. "A high stool, a brass grille through which all documents must be shoved and a safe you could cut open with a knife."

"And Skinner fits right into the picture," Cyclone added. "This is the way he operates: The day bids are received he'll get behind the grille fifteen minutes before the deadline. He'll receive the bids as they come in, pausing to examine the certified check, or count the money accompanying the bid as the case may be."

"Each bid must be accompanied by five per cent of the bid price," Bud said.

"Yep. Now you're settin' there when Tim comes in. You've got a half dozen bids in your pocket," Cyclone explained. "You watch Skinner count Tim's money. Multiply it by twenty and you've got his figure. Then you take the bid out of your pocket that'll just shade Tim's price and hand it to Skinner." He rubbed his hands gleefully. "We beat Tim, and at the same time we don't have to slash hell out of prices."

"How about Gaspard?"

"He's a buzzard, roostin' around, waitin' to see how this fight comes out so he can pick the bones, if any," Cyclone replied. "He'll bid for the looks of the thing, but it'll be plenty high. Now, turn in and get a good night's sleep. And never forget for a minute when you're fightin' Tim you're fightin' a Donovan."

WITH several bids in a brief case, Bud Donovan boarded a plane at Boeing Field in Seattle and in due time found himself in Tracy's Los Angeles office. Three or four men Bud knew by reputation, as well as Gaspard, were waiting. A clock on the wall indicated quarter to ten. Promptly Skinner, a gaunt individual who had taken on the color of parchment, appeared.

He smiled mirthlessly, and said, "Good morning, gentlemen. We—ah—extended the time of delivery, as you know, that certain other bidders might have an equal opportunity of supplying the lumber."

"In other words, Tim Donovan," Gaspard said bluntly.

Skinner did not appear to hear.

"We—ah—hope this extension will be reflected in the bids," he concluded, then turned and opened the safe.

A stenographer, all of sixty years old, was thumping away on a blind Remington. The clock ticked solemnly, and Mr. Skinner glanced at it often.

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At five minutes of ten Tim came into the office, bringing a gust of fresh air with him. The stenographer's papers stirred violently. She paused in her typing and gave Tim a brief stare of disapproval.

"Gentlemen!" Tim said, with a careless s a l u t e that included everyone. Then, "Hello, Bud!" Bud reddened slightly and Tim slid along a bench to his side. "No reason why we can't be friends," he suggested in a whisper.

"None at all," Bud replied. "Personally I'd prefer peace."

"Better not let the old man hear that," Tim warned. He glanced about and shuddered. "What a dreary place. If I stayed here an hour I'd be off in a corner, muttering. Did you see the look the museum piece at the typewriter gave me when I came in?"

"Yeah," Bud replied. "And still—"

"And still you've got to admit not one of Tracy's enterprises skipped a dividend the last few years," Tim added. "And his bonds are selling at par. That's s o m e t h i n g you can't laugh at."

Gaspard and the others slid their bids under the grille one by one. At three minutes to ten Tim submitted his.

"Cash, eh?" Skinner observed. He began counting, and his lips formed the numbers, "One, two, three, four," as he counted the hundred-dollar bills. He continued through the stack, counted them again and slipped a rubber band about them, reverently placed the roll in the safe.

Mentally Bud was calculating the amount of his brother's bid. He opened the brief case and selected an envelope with care. With steady fingers he slid it through the grille.

"Bid of the Donovan Logging Company," he said.

"Accompanied by a certified check," Skinner intoned. "Ten o'clock. No more bids will be accepted. You gentlemen will be notified of the result, and the unsuccessful bidders' deposits will be returned."

When Bud summoned sufficient courage to look Tim in the eyes, he found him grinning.

"Are you sure you gave him the right envelope?" Tim drawled.

"Absolutely," Bud retorted.

CHAPTER X.

WOOD TICKS.

AS Tim and Bud Donovan left Tracy's office after submitting their bids on the lumber contract, the latter growled, "What the hell are you laughing at, Tim?"

"You sitting there watching Skinner's lips while he counted the cash accompanying my bid," Tim replied. "I suppose you figure you know the exact amount of my bid?"

Bud Donovan's face got red.

"Aw, lay off," he protested.

"Now, listen, Bud," Tim said quietly; "you go back and tell the old man you followed his orders—and walked into something. I knew all about Skinner's trick of counting bid money. I had a hunch you'd try to cash in on it and horse me out of the deal. When you didn't put in your bid, my hunch was confirmed."

"Yeah?"

"Yeah!" Tim concluded. "So instead of accompanying my bid with five per cent of the price, I added enough to make it five and a half per cent. Figuring that I'd put up only five per cent, you shaded your price accordingly. But I've got a hunch I nosed you out."

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"I've got a hunch you have, Tim," Bud admitted. "But it's pretty early to cheer. You can't win. The old man's got you sewed up. You can't get your logs out. And if you don't, then Tracy will forfeit the bid money for failure to perform the contract. You must be leaning on Donovan luck."

"I can use a little Donovan luck," Tim answered, "but I'm not leaning on it. S'long. I've got another little deal on. I'm buying an old mill for a song."

"Buying an old mill down here when you can pick up a dozen at home?" The astounded Bud's voice caused people to turn and stare. Cyclone Donovan in his most turbulent mood couldn't have touched Bud. "Now I know you're crazy," he muttered in something like a normal tone.

"Yep!" Tim conceded and, grinning, hurried off.

By night Tim had concluded terms for the mill's purchase, subject to his receiving the Tracy contract. Early the following morning Tracy sent for him.

"You are low," he informed Tim. "You just sneaked under your father's figure. You should make some money under normal conditions. I am familiar with the situation up there and I entertain grave doubts of your ability to deliver lumber on time. Unless you can convince me your plans are sound, I shall have to reject your bid, and award the contract to your father."

"The old man has me sewed up. My only outlet is down Skookum River to the sea. I can't tow the logs around to the sound and put them through the mill because the rough water would break up the average raft," Tim explained.

"Go on!"

"I'm topping the trees and floating them, full-length, down the Skookum to Scow Bay. I'll make them up into cigar shaped, sea-going rafts and tow the rafts to a mill I've just bought and which will be moved to tidewater within a few miles of your building project," Tim concluded.

"But can you take a great log raft across the Scow Bay bar, through the rough water to the open sea?" Tracy asked. His eyes expressed serious doubts.

"It's never been done, but it's got to be put over this once," Tim answered. "Most sea-going rafts are made up in the Sound. But, I've had it tough ever since I can remember. I wouldn't know how to handle a soft job. So why not gamble with me? If I win you've got a mill that can deliver, on short notice, most anything you want."

Tracy turned to his secretary. "Skinner, bring that Donovan contract. We're going to sign it."

WITH the contract in his pocket, Tim boarded a northbound plane that night. The stewardess reclined his chair, tucked a pillow under his head and gave him a blanket, but he found sleep impossible. The lights of Sacramento found him mentally lining the scow up the Skookum. The lights of Medford and Eugene found him breaking a logging record with the help of the rough and ready Overtons and picked men from the CCC. When the plane landed at Swan Island in Portland the raft was mentally completed.

On the last leg of the flight to Tacoma the peaks of Rainier, Adams, St. Helens and Hood were snowy islands in a sea of white clouds, but Tim hardly noticed them. He was too busy taking the great raft through the surf. In all logging history no man had taken

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a greater gamble. And the dice he rolled would be eight million feet of logs, worth a hundred thousand dollars.

He left the plane at Tacoma, on the chance the sheriff might be waiting for him in Seattle. A stage carried him to the Peninsula, but several miles short of Mill City he signaled the driver to stop.

"I'm getting off here, Joe," he said. "You can guess why."

"A warrant's all made out charging second degree murder," the driver answered, "but I don't think the sheriff will serve it until Nord's body's found. Whoever spirited it away done a swell job. Sheriff can't find a trace."

"And he should be smart enough to know I won't skip the country with a big contract on my hands," Tim suggested. "But I can't take a chance."

The excuse he gave the driver was only part, and a very small part, of his reasons for quitting the journey short of Mill City. A trail a hundred yards away led to the Civilian Conservation Corps camp at Indian River. Tim expected this camp to supply him with a crew and he was ready to make his selection.

Comfortable barracks built in a clearing marked the camp. Beyond towered the snow-capped Olympics. Indian River brawled within a few yards of the entrance. On the flat above the stream stood the local ranger's cabin.

During working hours the men were under his direction. The remainder of the time, three Army officers and a hard boiled top sergeant had charge of the several hundred men. A Navy doctor looked after the camp's health.

Two squads were lined up, Tim noticed. One was bronzed, self-reliant, clear-eyed and well fed. Its members were dressed in uniforms that had seen hard service. Banter ran through the ranks. The other squad, in new uniforms, was composed of pale and frequently undernourished youths. Tim saw doubt, and often fear of the future, in their eyes. The great trees, the forest silence, appalled them.

"Before and after taking," Tim reflected.

TIM approached the ranger. "Hello, Dave," he said. "I suppose you heard I got the contract. Have you picked out some men for a crew?"

"I've got a bunch in mind," the ranger answered. "Ready for them?"

"Sure. What's the crowd over there?" He nodded towards a group conspicuous because of its restlessness. The different members were young, intelligent and the fires of revolt against all things burned brightly in their eyes. A product of the times, they made no attempt to conceal their contempt for their steadier fellows.

"They're a tough lot, Tim," the ranger answered. "They've been through the mill; learned everything I could teach them, and made trouble all the time. Other camps have weeded out their bad apples and shipped them here. The whole works will be fired home in a few days."

"Dave," Tim said after a moment's reflection, "I want that gang."

"Yeah," the ranger grumbled, "and if you were a wild animal trainer you'd try to work lions and tigers in the same cage. What do you suppose will happen when you try to mix that crowd with your Overton hill billies?"

"Nothing. A brawl or two, then—logging," Tim replied.

"It reminds me of the Irishman who went to the priest and asked to have Judgment Day explained. 'Do you

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mean to tell me all the different faiths will be up for judgment at the same time?' he asked. The priest said, 'Yes, Mike. They'll all be there!' 'Then,' said Mike, 'there'll be darned little judgin' the first day!' And there'll be darned little logging, Tim."

"Just the same, there's power in that bunch I'd like to harness." He walked over and met their mocking stares with a scowl. "They tell me you're tough," he drawled. "How tough?"

They exchanged glances. "Too tough for the CCC and the cops and marshals in any town in the Puget Sound country," one of them retorted.

"Not tough enough," Tim said. He removed his coat and doubled up his fists. "Pick the best man you've got, and we'll find out just how tough you are. Or any three men and I'll take 'em one at a time—rough and tumble fighting. Anything goes."

There was no answer. They merely exchanged surprised glances. Each waited for the other to speak.

"You've just been kiddin' yourselves, boys," Tim scoffed. "You're not tough at all. As a matter of fact you're a bunch of tin horns, playing a few ten year old tricks on your betters and thinking that's being tough. You're being kicked out because you're a bunch of damned nuisances."

Under his steady gaze and stinging words they reddened.

"We don't want any of your game, Donovan," one of them said at last. "Some of us saw you fight Chris Nord."

"The CCC's through with you. What do you want to do, go home and play at being tough, or hop into a real fight, and find out just how good you are? Now get this straight, I'm talking to the boys with brains, not the short sports that have been kidding themselves about their toughness," Tim said, walking closer. "You'll get twenty-five bucks a month to send home. You'll get ten, instead of the five you've been getting to spend on yourselves. And if I win, you'll share in the cut I take above expenses. There'll be steady jobs for those that want them."

THE Army and Forest Service men within the sound of Tim's voice expected a jeer for the answer. But it never came. These boys respected brute force and they had seen him fight the mighty Nord. And Nord was dead. That was something they could not laugh off. Tim's words put them on the defensive; stung them for the first time in their lives.

He challenged them and each found himself smouldering with repressed fury and anxious to prove his toughness. "I'll go with you, Donovan," one answered sullenly.

The others followed and Tim found himself surrounded by men whose emotions towards him were an odd mixture of admiration and downright hate. The camp was glad to ship them to Scow Bay, and while their equipment was being loaded into trucks the ranger talked with Tim.

"You attract trouble, you crazy Irishman, like honey does flies," he said. "Now I can pick a hundred good, steady men who—"

"This is a job for bad men, Dave," Tim interrupted.

Tim followed his crew to Scow Bay, where he found the Overtons. He lined them up.

"This is Pap," he said, introducing the head of the clan. "The bearded fellow is Enoch. Kentucky Logan has named the others Mox, Klone, Lakit, Kwin-num, Togh-um, Sin-a-moxt, Sto-

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te-kin and Kwaist. He's number nine of the boys, and the last."

"Hill billies," one of the CCC boys sneered.

"Wood ticks," Kwaist Overton retorted.

"Hold on, you," Tim cut in sharply. "Keep your shirts on."

The Overtons seemed eager to put the arrivals in their place; while the latter, longing to clean up on something in human form, jumped the mountaineers.

Tim's yells were ignored. He picked up a pick handle. "The first one who uses a stone or club gets this," he warned. He lighted a cigarette and perched himself on a stump.

Someone hung a haymaker on Pap's jaw and he stretched out on the sod.

"The birds must be singing to him," Tim reflected, "it's the first time I've seen a pleasant expression on his face, except the day we had that drinking bout."

TIM walked over, helped Pap to his feet and led him to the stump.

"Let's watch 'em, Pap," he suggested. "It'll teach 'em respect for one another and clear the atmosphere."

"I don't seem to be able to take 'em like I used to," Pap complained. "Damn it, I wished the law would stand for settlin' fights with a long bar'l squirrel gun."

A half dozen slug-fests were going at once. One Overton was writhing on the ground; and a CCC boy was moving about in a daze.

"That's enough of it," Tim said suddenly. "You've let off steam. Save your punches for Cyclone's loggers. You'll need them. Save 'em, I said."

The CCC boys eased up, but Kwaist Overton, being young and hot-headed, whirled and savagely retorted, "You licked Chris Nord, but you haven't taken on me yet. I'm choosing you right now!"

Tim would have preferred to avoid trouble with the Overtons. Their hate for the Donovans was so close to the surface a little thing might start a blaze. But the CCC boys' eyes were on him.

Kwaist possessed courage, hot blood and a murderous right hand which Tim took good care to avoid. He fought off the younger fellow several minutes, then slipped over a punch to the jaw that dropped him. Kwaist was lifted to his feet by two of his bothers.

"I hate your guts, Tim," he said thickly.

"We all do, kid," Klone said. "But there's a job to be done. When it's finished we'll settle the old account."

"You put up a good fight," Tim said, hoping to smooth matters somewhat.

Kwaist's face was white and the muscles about his jaw were trembling with fury. "Go to hell, Donovan," he answered.

Pap Overton joined them. "Tim, what's your plan? The sooner we start to work, the better," he said.

CHAPTER XI.

HELL-ROARING CANYON.

"SUPPOSE you and the boys build a camp at the headwaters of Deuce Creek," Tim said. "Barracks and cookhouse will be log cabins and you can handle a double-bitted ax better than the CCC boys. We'll get the scow load of equipment up there."

The mountaineers approved of this suggestion, as it gave them an opportunity to work together. Tim led his crew to the scow. A tug had brought

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it over the bar to Scow Bay. There was evidence it had shipped a sea or two in the process. The yarder was rusty in spots; and the spools of wire rope were beginning to rust. The scow leaked slightly, but it rode well enough in spite of its load.

Tim sent a party up the river to cut fuel and pile it along the bank. "You will have to do your own cooking," he said, "and if you get tired of tinned grub, there's salmon running in the river."

Tim lined up the others and contemplated them with studied shakes of the head. In another day, he decided, they would hate him. Under his skeptical expression they flushed. "Remembering again," he said, "that you're a tough outfit, which one of you is the toughest?"

"Donnybrook McDuff can lick any man in the outfit," one of them answered.

"All right, McDuff, step forward," Tim directed. "Why do they call you Donnybrook?"

"The Donnybrook Fairs were pretty rough," McDuff answered haltingly, "and in my town..."

"I see, and your town thought you were pretty rough, and nicknamed you Donnybrook," Tim fairly purred.

"Damn you," Donnybrook flared, "I didn't win that name playing with daisies."

"Keep your shirt on," Tim admonished. "I'm just getting information."

"And you'll get a bust on the jaw when I harden up," Donnybrook promised. He was six feet tall, with wide shoulders, jet black hair and blue eyes. He had a handsome, sullen face, and rarely smiled. His hands were large, but lacked the thickness that comes from hard work.

"Save that bust on the jaw until later," Tim said. "I've got a job that needs a tough man. We're taking a canoe load of dynamite up to Hell-Roaring Canyon."

"Dynamite!" Donnybrook's eyes widened. He entertained the city man's respect and fear of high explosives. "It's going to be in the canoe with us?"

"That's the only way we can get it there, unless we pack it on our backs. There won't be much," Tim assured him. "Just a few hundred pounds." He pointed to a small cabin back in the woods. "It's stored there. You can begin by packing the cases down to the river bank."

Tim turned to the others. "I'll get you started on the scow," he said.

One gang was sent upstream, dragging the wire rope from the yarder drums. This was secured to a tree and Tim opened the throttle, winding the rope up slowly. And as slowly the scow began bucking the stream.

"You see how it's done," he said.

A man detailed to handle the levers nodded.

"Take it easy and watch out for rocks," Tim warned. "There'll be times when you'll need two cables pulling at different angles to get around the tough spots. If you get stuck, let me know."

SCOW BAY had once been the site of a thriving native village. Differing some from the Sound Indians, the Scow Bay tribe often went great distances to sea fishing, whaling, and sealing. In their war canoes they had fought the fierce natives that came on raiding expeditions from the North.

A few canoes remained, and Tim bought one of the smaller craft, designed for river work. Like the war

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canoes, it was hollowed from a cedar log, fashioned along graceful lines and carried a high bow for breasting heavy seas.

He lashed a timber well astern, running it beyond the port and starboard beams. On either side he fastened a small outboard motor. Tests proved the craft capable of amazing speed. With Donnybrook McDuff's grudging assistance the canoe was loaded. Drill steel and hammers were stowed on the bottom for ballast, and the powder cases distributed over them.

"Donnybrook, you'll ride in the bow, and keep a sharp lookout for submerged boulders," Tim said. "Sing out if it looks as if we'd crash."

"Sure." Donnybrook wiped the perspiration from his forehead. "I'll only have one guess, I suppose."

"Small craft loaded with dynamite have been known to crash without a blast," Tim replied, "but it's rare. I wouldn't depend on it if I were you."

The first mile was not difficult, as the stream moved slowly through a deep, wide channel. It was here they passed the scow. Presently they were in white water. The craft slowed as it bucked the current. Donnybrook's eyes bulged in his efforts to detect rocks that did not exist. Once he looked back and growled, with a trace of admiration, "Donovan, you're a cool customer. You could hang a man without batting an eye."

"Are you still worrying over this powder?" Tim countered. "Hell, I'd sooner set you ashore than—"

"Who said anything about going ashore?" Donnybrook demanded. "I'm stringing with you until the job's done, then I'm going to clean up on you. No logger's going to make a sucker out of me."

Tim grinned. He was positive he had made no mistake in his selections.

They camped at dusk. Tim cooked a meal, and the two ate like horses. The dull boom of the stream rolling over a boulder-strewn bed was constantly in their ears.

"Hell-Roaring Canyon," Tim said. "We'll be there, first thing in the morning."

They bucked some swift water before the walls narrowed to the canyon proper. Donnybrook McDuff almost forgot his job as he gazed ahead. High above, a tree eight feet thick at the butt spanned the gorge, which at that point was a hundred and twenty-five feet across.

"How'd that get there?" he asked in a hushed voice. "It must weigh tons."

"It does. Skookum means strong, in Chinook," Tim explained. "Probably a Chinook, or warm wind, ran the snow off the mountains in a hurry. The stream overflowed its banks, tore out that big fur, and started it down the canyon. Sections of the top snapped off until the trunk was too thick to snap. Backed by the weight of the trunk and the momentum, plus the force of the current, it stuck and wedged. When the water went down, it was left there."

TIM drove the canoe to a point above the log and made fast to a boulder. Here the walls were damp and mossy, but a strong man could climb them. With a coil of rope about his waist, Tim worked his way to an overhanging cliff. He lowered the rope and hauled up the first case of powder, then stored it in a natural cave.

The second case followed, and after an hour of it McDuff came up and

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spelled him. By sundown they had powder and steel stored, as well as several days' supply of grub.

"Tomorrow," Tim announced, "I'll make a hard-rock driller out of you."

Early the following morning Donnybrook found himself sitting on a grain sack, a short length of steel between his legs, with Tim swinging a hammer dangerously close to his head. After each blow he twisted the drill slightly. His hands played out before Tim's arms, then the latter began single jacking—twisting the drill with his left hand and swinging a lighter hammer with his right. Donnybrook did the camp work, then inspected his surroundings.

From a point a half mile above the canyon the ridge above the Skookum River was a scene of desolation—a forest laid flat. Climbing the ridge, he looked towards the straits of Juan de Fuca, miles away, and saw the scene of the fire of twenty years ago. New trees had grown from natural seeding, presenting a bright green belt through the vast stand of older trees. It ran straight to the Salmon River and ended abruptly.

"And that fire made Cyclone do things that's changed the course of a lot of lives, including mine," Donnybrook reflected. "I wonder how it's all going to turn out." He rubbed his wrists and forearm thoughtfully. The muscles were beginning to cramp from the long period of drilling.

Those same muscles gave him pain for about an hour the next day, but by ten o'clock they had loosened up. He managed to stand the gaff a little longer.

"Want to swing the hammer a while?" Tim asked.

"No, I'm afraid I'd hit you," Donnybrook answered.

So Tim went it alone. It was a slow business, and the job was but half done when the scow came in sight. The crew snubbed the wallowing craft to a rock and came up for instructions.

"We'll never get her through those rocks in the canyon," one of them said. "It took us a day to get by one spot down the river."

"Have any of you ever swung a hammer?" Tim asked.

"I have," one answered after some hesitation. "I served six months on a chain gang once. Drunken driving."

"Take this hammer and start drilling," Tim directed. "Some of you bring up the hand forge and a sack of blacksmith coal and the anvil. This steel is dull. The others clear the trail along the river. We'll be using it a lot."

HE sent the canoe down to Scow Bay for a load of fresh provisions, and instructions to tow a second loaded canoe behind it.

"There's power enough in the two outboards to put you through the fast water," he assured the two men he had detailed to serve as crew.

"What do you want me to do?" Donnybrook asked with a trace of bitterness in his voice. "Do a hand-stand on a log while it floats through the canyon? It couldn't be any worse than bringing a load of powder through white water."

Tim ignored the barb. "Can you top a tree?" he asked.

"Sure!" Donnybrook replied. "There isn't a damned job in the woods that I can't do."

"See that fir?" Tim indicated the only big tree growing near the river bank on the south side. Its scant top explained how it had survived the sil-

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ver thaw. "Lop off that top, a hundred and fifty feet from the ground. I'll have a look at the tree on the other side. They're going to serve as gin poles for a high lead set-up."

Tim tossed an ax and climbing irons over one shoulder, picked up a short saw, and crossed the stream on the jammed log.

Donnybrook scowled at his tree and a surge of fear passed through him. "And he stung me into saying I could top a tree," he growled. "I never topped one in my life."

He directed a string of oaths at Tim Donovan, then strapped on the climbing irons.

"Hey, McDuff," a companion warned, "you ain't goin' up that tree? You ain't a high climber."

"That crazy Irishman has sounded off too many times about us being tough. Even when he calls me Donnybrook, there's a kind of sneer in his voice. I'm getting so I hate the name. I used to be proud of it. I don't know how you feel about it, but he isn't going to make me back down. I've gone a hundred feet up a tree. Well, I can go a hundred and fifty feet," McDuff declared. "Topping can't be any more than sawing and hanging on."

Tim, across the gorge, glanced towards Donnybrook several times, and saw that he was climbing slowly upward, cutting off the branches as he climbed.

He dug in his own irons, flipped the rope with its wire core upward, and when it caught in the rough bark, climbed up and repeated the act. Cutting limbs required expert ax work. The rope, girding the tree, naturally stopped immediately under the limb that was to be cut. A slip of the ax might well sever the rope and send the climber plunging earthward.

The speed with which Tim swung the ax might have appeared careless, but it was speed born of long practice. The limbs dropped, and the man himself moved higher. Presently he stopped, made a neat undercut, then began to saw.

There is no job exactly like it in all the world. The top itself weighs several tons. And those tons, when the cut is complete, fall from a platform a few inches in diameter, a hundred and fifty feet in the air.

The kick-back as the weight leaves is tremendous, and the high-climber is in the relative position of a monkey on the end of a limber stick.

JUST as Tim's top started to go he kicked his spurs free, and in the same movement freed the rope. He dropped several feet, dug in with his spurs, and held on. The top kicked back and rushed downward, the tree vibrated, then steadied—no longer a tree, but a gin pole.

Tim climbed up to examine the job. The cut was clean, and the wood was not splintered. Here a ring would be fitted, from which would radiate a web of supporting wires, and the heavy steel blocks that were to handle the running wire rope.

Tim looked at Donnybrook. The man's back was turned, and he was sawing hard.

"He should have had that topped by now," Tim mused, then something to the southwest caught his interest. Plumes of steam were shooting above the forest crown. The white vapor would linger a moment against the dark green, then dissipate.

Jacques Gaspard owned that timber, which was remote from his main logging road. Yet a donkey was at work. Why? It gave Tim some concern. Gas-

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pard invariably did the unexpected; and the man, naturally, had not forgotten, and certainly not forgiven, that open-handed slap Tim had administered.

With his father on one side and Gaspard on the other, he was in the position of a nut about to be cracked. But some nuts are hard and slip from the cracker if the pressure is improperly applied.

To the northward other plumes marked the location of the Cyclone Donovan skidders, working on the first of Bud Donovan's down timber.

"It looks as if they'd take Bud's stuff out by extending the Strawberry Bench spur," Tim reflected. "Hello! Here's Kentucky Logan in person."

The mountaineer was swinging up the Skookum River trail, each stride eating up better than three feet of ground. A sudden yell, audible above the boom of the rapids, diverted Tim's attention from his old friend. Donnybrook McDuff's top was plunging earthward, but the man dangled head downward, held in some manner by a spur that had caught in his fouled rope.

Tim signaled to the startled crew that he was coming, then descended in a series of breathless spirals that left deep grooves in the bark. He jumped to the wedged log, raced across and crawled to the brink. Several men dragged him to his feet, and one flared, "You don't care about other men's lives as long as you get your damned logs out, do you? McDuff had never topped a tree before."

"I didn't know that," Tim answered.

He went up the tree and found McDuff shaken and bleeding where his arms and face had scraped against the rough bark. The blood had rushed to his head until his face was purple, otherwise he would have been ashen. There was stark fear in the depths of his eyes.

"When the top left I was shook loose," he said.

"Don't move!"

Tim dug in his spikes and securely knotted the rope to the rings in his heavy leather belt. This drew him fairly close to the tree. He then fastened a line to the other's belt and rove it through a small block which he had carried up with him. Securing the block to the tree, he tossed the running end of the rope to the ground.

"Tighten up, easy!" he ordered.

THREE men took up the slack, and Donnybrook kicked himself free. Slowly he was lowered to the ground. As Tim joined him, Kentucky Logan ran up, breathing hard.

"I saw him slip, Tim," he panted, "and—"

Donnybrook wiped the blood from his face. There was no friendship in his eyes as he scowled at Tim.

"Where's the next tree you want topped?" he demanded.

"We've done enough for today," Tim answered. "Knock off!"

Donnybrook was shaking from head to foot.

"I've got to top a tree right now," he said.

"Take it easy, Donnybrook—" Tim began.

"Damn it to hell," McDuff bellowed, "don't call me Donnybrook. I know what you think of me and my nickname. Gimme a tree! Can't you see this is getting me? That I'm turning yellow? I've got to beat this thing and do it alone."

"Get hold of yourself," Tim said sharply.

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The next instant McDuff's hand had lashed out, and Tim crashed to the ground.

He tried to draw his knees under him as he shook his head, then he collapsed.

McDuff gathered up his ax, saw, and wire-cored rope.

"I'm topping the first tree that looks as if it might be needed," he said thickly, "and I'm prepared to kill the first so and so who tries to stop me, or —help me."

From the shaking creature they called Donnybrook the others looked to Tim Donovan stretched out on the soft rot of the forest floor.

"Yellow," one of them jeered. "You could've got up and didn't. Your eyes were clear all the time."

Kentucky Logan placed a restraining hand on the hothead's arm.

"Would you have him get up and hit a man trying to regain his courage?" he asked softly.

Tim got up. He understood McDuff's reasoning. It was the same sound logic which sends an aviator aloft after a crash.

Work stopped, and they stood around in small knots, watching the trees bordering the Skookum River.

Nothing happened. Fifteen minutes of silence were broken by a girl's quick step.

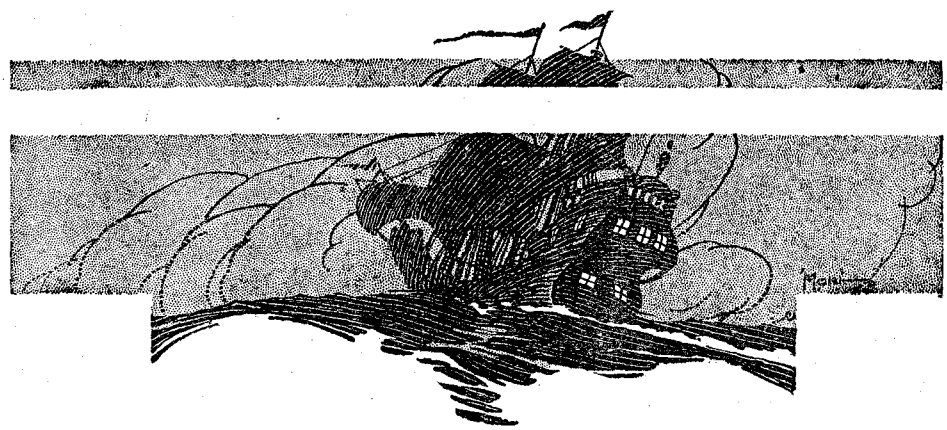
They turned and saw Ruth Overton running towards them. For a moment Tim forgot Donnybrook McDuff in his delight at seeing the girl. He had never seen her quite so radiant. Running had brought a delicate flush to her cheeks and a sparkle to her black eyes. Something came into Tim's eyes that only Kentucky noticed.

The mountaineer shook his head.

"When a man looks at a girl like that, it means complications," he muttered. "And yet, if it wasn't for the feud between Cyclone and Pap, which the young'uns naturally inherit along with cussedness and ailments of the flesh, it'd be a good thing."

It struck Kentucky, also, a rather fine light came to Ruth's eyes when she looked at Tim. Or was that merely a feminine trick? For reasons of her own, was she trying to win the big logger and then lead him around by the nose for the revenge and glory of the Overtons?

TO BE CONCLUDED NEXT WEEK.



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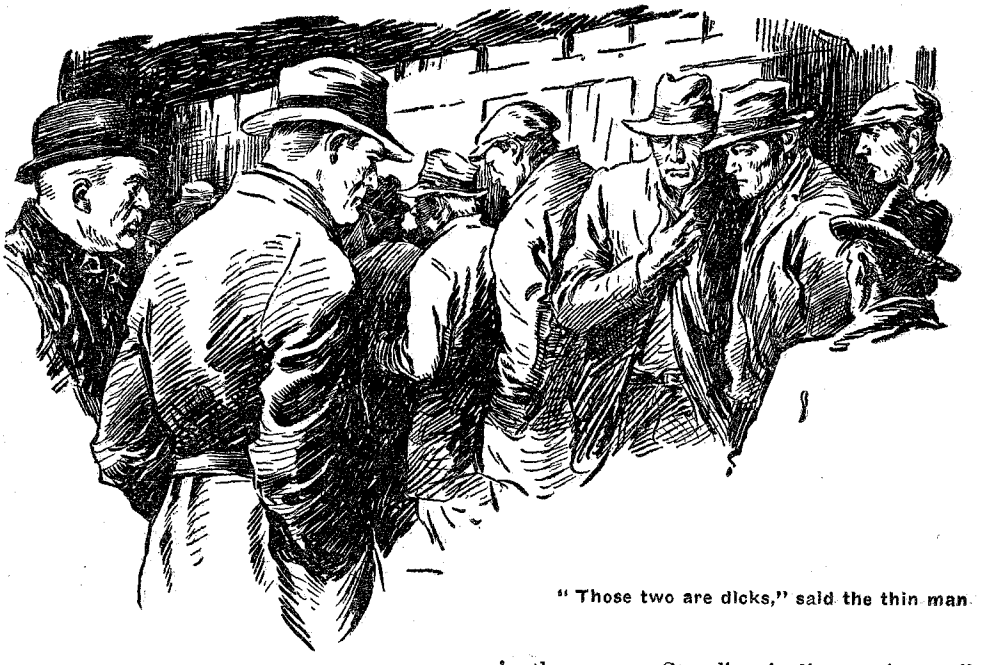

"Those two are dicks," said the thin man.

The Killers

By FRANKLIN H. MARTIN

A FINE, drizzling rain was falling and the long single file of drab looking men hugged the side of the building. Battered hat brims pulled down, shabby coat collars turned up. Tall men and short, lean men and lumpy, but all with a certain look in common—acknowledged defeat. The bread line.

One step forward, drag the other foot, then wait, another step forward. A regular, shuffling sound, like a march cadence in slow motion. The human caterpillar edged up. Toward a tin cup of soup and a chunk of bread. A tall man, thin and stooped, mumbled half-aloud, "Just like in the army. Standing in line again . . ."

The man in front of him turned his head. Clothes hung in scarecrow limpness from his wide frame. "Yah. Just like the army." There was a decided Teutonic tone in his voice.

"I mean the army, over in France," the tall, stooped man said. "The rain soaking in all the time, and standing in line for chow. That's the army I mean, mister."

"Yah, sure," the other agreed. "Like the army in France. Stand in line in the rain . . . Yah."

Silence for a while, step and shuffle. Wait, step and shuffle again. After a little the tall man asked in a flat, toneless voice, "What outfit?"

"Three Hundred and One Bavarian Light Infantry. I was a corporal."

"Oh!" The stooped man grunted. "You were a Kraut—a Jerry?"

Once they had sought to kill each other on the battlefields of France—now they faced a different kind of death together

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"Yah," the other agreed soberly. "I remember you Yankees called us that. In the Yankee hospital they were very kind. A Yankee hospital orderly told me once, 'You Krauts get just the same as we get.' I was treated well."

"What Yankee hospital?" The tall, stooped man's voice was still spiritless.

"That was in the Base Hospital at Dijon. I was also at the evacuation hospital near Souilly, where I had been taken from the field dressing station at Nantillois. You see I was wounded in the Bois de la Cote Lemont and—"

"What were you doing in the Bois Lemont?" The tall, stooped man's voice showed a flicker of interest for the first time.

"I was in charge of a machine gun," the other said. "We were holding up the Yankee advance."

"Well, what do you know about that?" There was a note of far-away pensiveness in the stooped man's tone. "Me, I was a sergeant in Company K, 58th Infantry. You know, Fourth Division. We cleaned a lot of Krauts out of a corner of those Lemont woods."

"It was on October second," the ex-Bavarian infantryman said. "I was with my squad in a sunken road in the northeast section of these woods. Suddenly a patrol of Yankee soldiers came through. They came from our right when we had expected them to be in front. We swung the gun around, but had to hold our fire to be sure we were not firing on our own troops."

"Yeah," the one-time sergeant of the 58th agreed. "Had to be careful of that up in those woods. Lines all balled up . . ."

TWO husky, well fed men in dripping slickers came down the line, inspecting the faces of the men in the bread line. They peered intently at each one, then moved on. After they had gone on down the line the ex-doughboy sergeant told his companion in the bread line, "Those two are dicks. They case this line every day. Looking for wanted men. Things are so tough they even find criminals in the bread line."

"Yah, I know."

"So you got hit October second in the Lemont woods," the tall man mused. "I remember that day. Our outfit lost plenty men."

"I was telling you. Yah. Through the bushes from our right they came, almost running, they were." The German's accent got thicker. He crouched a little, as if getting set to swing the Maxim gun toward the enemy. "Soon I see they are Yankees. I command to fire. We open up. Down we mow them. Eight, they are, at first. Then four and then two, as we fire into them. But they keep coming. They fire with rifles as they run toward us. One of them a hand grenade hurls. Kills two of my squad. The gun feeder and myself still are alive. The two Yankees scream and shout and keep running toward us through the brush. One goes down. The other keeps coming.

"He is a giant, a great brute of a man with no hat, and clothes torn open. He carries a rifle, tipped with a bayonet. We fire point-blank. He falters, then he is upon us. My feeder he kills with one lunge of the bayonet. I remember he has to fire his rifle so the recoil will free it from my gunner's ribs. I fire at him with my pistol, just as he plunges at me. Through here—" The German touched a spot high on his left breast. "He ran me through . . ."

The tall, thin man swung the other around, pushed his hat back and stared at the face under it. Studied the lean, haggard countenance, the deep-sunk eyes. Then he shook his head. "Nope . . . For a minute I thought it was the guy I stuck. The two of us lay there for hours, and I gave this Kraut a cigarette. I guess we both thought we were going to kick in, because we just lay there. I was the only survivor of my squad. We rushed a gun in a sunken road just like you said. Only this Kraut corporal was hardly more'n a kid. A husky kid with big shoulders and

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curly yellow hair and pink cheeks. I got soft-hearted and gave him a butt and plugged up his shoulder with my first aid kit while we waited for the stretcher bearers. We tried to talk a little. The way you told it I thought maybe it was you, but it wasn't."

"No, I am sure." The German was just as positive. "There was just this one Yankee left. He got me with his bayonet. He was a giant. Big and brown and strong. I would know him anywhere. He came running through the bushes. His teeth flashed like his bayonet. He was magnificent, and terrible . . . Yet, even as you did, he gave me a cigarette and kept me from bleeding to death. All the time he, too, was wounded. I shot half his ear off with my pistol. It is strange how the two stories are alike, and on the same day . . ."

"Look!" The tall, stooped man took off his hat. He turned his head around so the other could see. His right ear was only a twisted piece of flesh. The German stared at it, then looked at the tall man's gaunt, lined face.

HIS expression and voice were incredulous. "It was you, then. But it is hard to believe. This American was so big and strong. He had great shoulders and chest. He was like a super-man . . ."

"That was a long time ago," the tall man said. "A long time. Guess I've changed. You've changed plenty. You were a nice-looking kid—and game. Now, well, you look just like the rest of these bums. Come to think of it, maybe I do, too."

"Yah, Sergeant. You do. You look just like the rest of these bums. You saved my life that day—after you almost killed me. You were gallant toward a fallen enemy. I guess, after that, I should have made something of my life. But that is not your fault. You saved it. I, myself, missed the chance to live again as I started to live, before the war."

"I sort of muffed things, too, I guess." The tall, stooped man put his hat back on and pulled its brim down against the rain. "After I got out of the hospital in the States, I got my old job back again, and got married. You married?"

"No. Soon after the war I came here to America. But I was not very steady."

"I got married. Got two kids. The boy is twelve. Girl is ten. They used to be kind of proud of me at first, when they were tiny kids. They used to brag how their old man was in the war. Peggy was proud of me, too—for a while. Whisky lost me every job I ever got. Plenty jobs for me at first, no matter how much I drank, but after a while people started to duck when I came along. First thing I knew I was a regular drunk and a bum, and my wife and kids were ashamed of me. I used to get some disability money, but that stopped. Used to spend it over the bar, anyway."

"Yah, yah. I know." The German shook his head. "For me, maybe it is good I look like all the other bums in this line." His voice dropped to a confidential whisper. "Or those two cops might pick me out of the line. Not that it would matter much."

"What for? What would they pinch you for?"

"About ten years ago I helped rob a bank in Springfield. A guard was killed. I was young and restless. Some man I met in a pool room said he heard I had been in the army, and could I use an automatic rifle . . . They never found me. The other they killed as we made our escape."

"No use my making promises," the tall stooped man said. "Soon as I get a dollar I spend it on whisky. The wife has kept the two kids alive for years by sewing. She feeds me too, when I'm low enough to sneak around and share their chow."

The bread line approached the shed where the soup kettle was placed. The German got his tin cup of hot soup and chunk of bread and waited for the ex-sergeant of the 58th Infantry. Together they walked over to a corner of the long table. It was not very warm inside the abandoned

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car barns the Salvation Army used for a soup kitchen, but there was a roof to keep out the rain, and long wooden benches and tables where a man could sit down while he wolfed his chunk of bread and drank his soup. The two sat alone, out of earshot of the other derelicts.

"Did you hear what I told you?" the German asked. "I helped rob a bank. The police are still looking for me."

"What the hell's the difference?" The ex-doughboy sergeant sopped up the last few drops of soup with fragments of crust. "The day we got our discharge some brigadier general made us a speech. He said the battle of peace would try us more sorely than the shell-fire of France. We all gave him the bird. Peace and war are all the same to a general. But this bird had the right dope. I got by all right in the war. But I couldn't get back into low gear again."

THE German peered regretfully at his empty soup cup. "Yah. With me it is the same. I am pushed off balance so I can be a good soldier. I cannot get back when it is peace again . . . Look, my friend, you have children and a wife. Once I was your prisoner. Often I have thought it would be good to meet you again and say how gallant you were that October day in 1918. Life holds less for me now than it did then. It is no great sacrifice when I tell you I am still your prisoner."

"What you talking about?" The tall, stooped man scowled. "The war's been over for years."

"Yah. But the battle of peace is still on. I owe everything to you. And I am worth six thousand dollars."

"You got six grand, and you're in the bread line?"

"No. I haven't a penny. But you can get it."

"So far," the tall thin man said slowly, "I managed to keep out of real downright crime. Think I'll try to stick it out a little longer. When I'm sober and I get a look at my wife's pale face and the pinched look the two kids have—then I think I'll go out and rob a bank, even if I get killed doing it. Just so they can eat for a while and lift their chins and smile . . . I know by now I'll never support them the way a man should. I haven't got it in me any more."

"You do not have to commit a crime," the other said. "The crime was done ten years ago. You can perform a public service. It will be worth six thousand dollars to you. Also it will return you to good standing in the eyes of your fellow men. Even, you might get a good job from it. Five thousand dollars is offered by the Bankers' Association, another thousand is offered by the city where the guard lived who was killed during the hold-up. Six thousand in all." The German stood up, stood very straight, and clicked the heels of his soggy, run-down shoes. "Those two detectives are outside—I am your prisoner."

The tall, stooped man sat there looking up at the shabby figure standing stiffly at attention. A pained look knotted his features. "Listen, Mr. Jerry Machine Gunner, I admit I am a bum and a drunk, and can't support my wife and kids—but do I look like that much of a heel? Do I? Honest to God, do I look like a Judas?"

"But I do not care," the other protested. "It would be as if I myself gave up. But you can have the reward. Food and clothes for your family. A thrifty woman can do a lot with six thousand dollars. Give it all to her, eh, my friend? It will be a present from the two of us."

"Sit down, Jerry."

The ex-Jerry sat down.

"I don't believe you really had anything to do with robbing any bank in Springfield."

"Before Heaven, I did. Turn me in and see."

"Tell me all about it—everything."

THE one time corporal in charge of a machine gun crew left behind to hold up the Yankee advance, told the story of the bank robbery, ten years

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before, in Springfield. From time to time the ex-doughboy sergeant would interrupt with a question.

"What kind of automatic rifle?"

"A Colt."

"How many rounds did you fire, and where is the gun now?"

"Twenty-one shots. The gun I threw in the bushes north of the town. They later found it. I wore gloves."

"All right. Then what?"

The time, the weather, the name of the guard who was killed. The name of the man who planned the stick-up and was killed running away. The kind of car, the model and color, used for the getaway. The name of the pool room where the bank robber met the man who knew about automatic rifles, every minute detail.

"Who killed the guard, you or the other fellow?"

"He did. He was rattled. I placed my shots so they ducked for cover. You do not have to kill if you stay cool. He killed the guard with a Colt .45 automatic. I was using Springfield .30-.30 shells. But it does not matter. As an accomplice I am just as guilty."

"And there was just the two of you?"

"Yes."

"Now," the ex-doughboy said slowly, "let me see if I've got it straight. Stop me if I make a mistake." He repeated the crime in every detail.

"Yah." The other nodded his head approvingly. "Now you believe me?"

"Now I believe you."

"And you turn me in?" The German's attitude was suddenly animated. Color came into his sunken cheeks and his eyes were several shades bluer, lighted with a proud sparkle. "Food for those loved ones, eh? Big juicy pot roast with brown potatoes and green spinach cooked in butter, eh, Sergeant? Pan cakes and jelly and big jugs of milk until their little bellies are stuffed. It will be a present from you and me, eh?"

The tall, stooped man nodded slowly. He removed his battered hat and his fingers felt of the stub of what had been an ear until that October day in 1918. Suddenly a grin creased his bony face.

"Remember that day in the Lemont woods? You thought we were right in front of you, didn't you? All the time I knew where you had that Maxim set up in the sunken road. We kept heaving stones over to our right, and sneaking up quietly. We outflanked you, see?"

"Yah. I remember. I thought you were ahead of us, until suddenly you rush us from our right. Otherwise we easily kill you all."

"Sure," the ex-sergeant agreed. "I out-maneuvered you."

"Yah." The German nodded. "And now we will go out and find those two policemen. Or if they have gone we will walk to the nearest police station. You will firmly take hold of me as we go in, eh? I am your prisoner." He stood up, and he was smiling. "After all these years I am once more your prisoner."

The tall, stooped man stood up, too. "After all these years I have out-maneuvered you again, Mr. Jerry Machine Gunner. So long." He stuck out a large, bony hand. "Lots of luck."

"But to turn me in?"

"Forget it. You don't know it, but I flanked you again." The tall, thin man was not so stooped as he walked briskly out of the abandoned car barns. He walked with a swing to his stride, like a file-closer beside a marching column of infantry. The ex-German machine gunner stood there watching him go, a puzzled frown on his gaunt face.

MILTON WEINER came out into his anteroom. His secretary was trying to keep a man from coming in to see him. The man was insistent. Weiner walked out and said, "What's the trouble, Miss Hecker?"

"This man was trying to see you. I told him you couldn't be disturbed."

The tall, thin man was still standing pretty straight, but his clothes were soiled and wrinkled, sodden looking from the rain, twisted from having been slept in.

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"What did you want?" the young attorney asked.

"You're in politics," the tall, thin man said, "but I hear you're honest, in spite of that. I want you to turn me in for a crime I committed ten years ago. There's a reward, and I want my wife and kids to get it. Can you arrange that?"

"Come in," the young attorney said soberly. "Come in and tell me the whole story." He led the tall, thin man into his small private office and closed the door.

For twenty minutes he listened, interrupting with a question now and then. Then he walked to the window and stood with his back to the room, staring out. At length he whirled, said crisply, "Come back here at four this afternoon. Here's a couple of dollars. Get a meal. I'll check on your story."

"And you can fix it so they get the reward?"

"I think so, yes. I can handle it and transfer the funds to them. You'll have to trust me."

The tall, stooped man left and the young lawyer sat back and stared at the wall. Then he lifted the phone and asked for the chief of police at Springfield. He talked for about fifteen minutes and had just replaced the receiver when his secretary came in.

"There's another tramp out there, Mr. Weiner! He says it's about the same thing."

"Another?" The young lawyer's frown deepened. "Let him in."

The ex-German soldier walked in, clicked his heels. "I followed my friend, because I knew what he was going to do. Years ago he out-maneuvered me. That taught me a lesson. He thinks he has done it again. He just confessed to you that he robbed a bank in Springfield. No?"

"That's right." The young lawyer caught himself. "What are you talking about? He did nothing of the kind."

"Do not fear," the ragged man made a placating gesture. "I am not trying to take your prisoner. This is something I have owed him for some time. It was I who helped rob that bank."

"For the love of Heaven!" The young lawyer grabbed the arms of his chair. "What's this all about?"

"Just a little game by two old soldiers. I guessed what he was going to do. I was certain when he said he had out-maneuvered me. The reward is to be paid to his wife and children, you understand?"

"Yes, of course. But which of you is telling the truth?"

"I am." Proudly. "I was afraid he would not turn me in if I told him all. It was a .30-.30 bullet that killed the guard. It ricocheted from the bank wall. My friend, the sergeant, thinks it was a forty-five. It was a shell from the gun I was firing."

Attorney Weiner rocked slowly in his chair. "Do you realize that means the electric chair?"

"Quite well . . . But do not let my friend the sergeant get hold of me. He will be very angry when he finds it is I who has out-maneuvered him. Could you put me some place for safe keeping?"

The young attorney swallowed several times. "I have heard strange stories about men doing things for each other. I never believed half of them. Why—why are you walking right to the electric chair for this piece of human driftwood?"

"It is not for him, really," the other smiled. "It is for a great, strong young man of years ago. It is for his children who might one day be like the man he once was. It is a gift from the two of us, you see? It all started one day in October, 1918, in a place in France called the Bois de la Cote Lemont. But nobody remembers that any more . . . I wanted to live that day. He let me live, and fixed the wound he himself had just inflicted, and gave me half of his last cigarette . . . And now, I no longer care if I live or not. It is all very simple, isn't it? They will have pork roasted to a crisp brown, and heaps of sauerkraut and chunks of bread with thick lumps of butter . . ."

THE END

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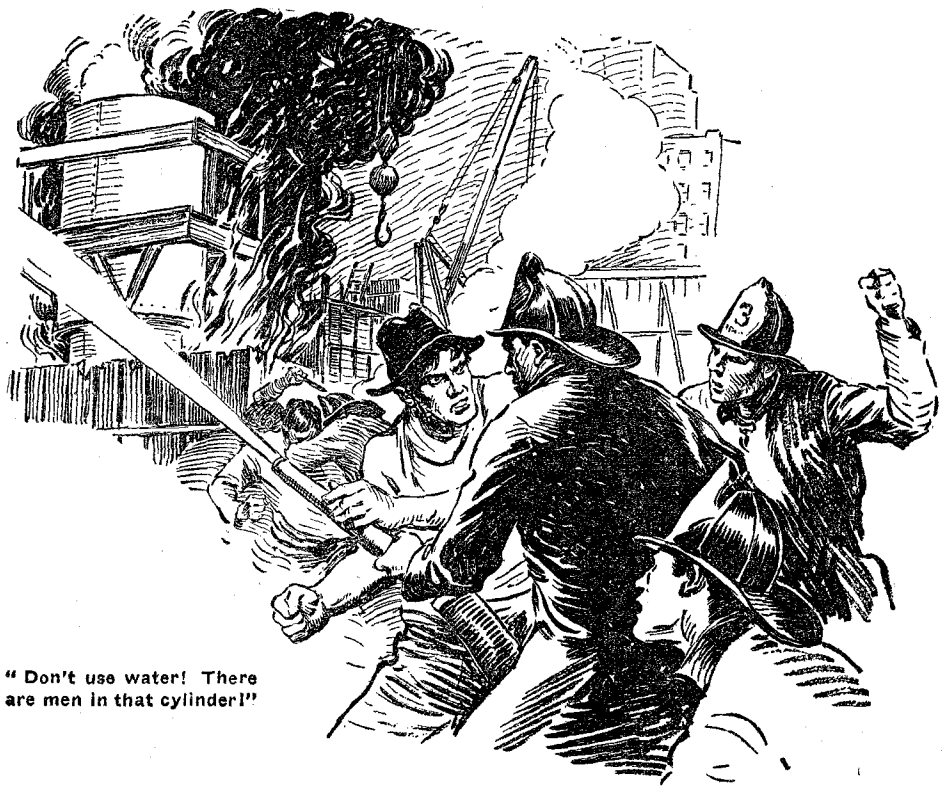
A river of sand was pouring on their heads, a smothering rush of water beat against them—only sand hogs could defy such terrific odds



"Don't use water! There are men in that cylinder!"

Bed Rock

By BORDEN CHASE

LEADING UP TO THIS CONCLUDING INSTALLMENT

UNDER the leadership of stalwart Terry Braid, an independent group of sand hogs is engaged in sinking cylinders for a skyscraper foundation near Wall Street in lower Manhattan. Having begun the work strictly with their own resources, every construction company in the city is out to blacklist the men who are working under Terry. But the J. P. Cotello Company resorts to stronger measures and attempts to put the air compressor, most vital of the sand hog's implements, out of commission. But Cotello's intimidation is unsuccessful.

A few days after the work has begun, Terry's old friend, Duke Corey, arrives on the scene, and asks for a job on this latest sand hog venture. Terry takes him on, but makes the mistake of introducing him to his attractive and charming lady friend, the rich Fay Morley. Fay immediately shows an interest in Duke.

Old Matt McCarthy and the "Swede," both of them Terry's workers, visit Fay at her Park Avenue residence, when they drive her car home. They tell her about the job, and she decides to help the work along by renting another air compressor.

Later she meets Duke and Terry at the

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Astor Grill—and J. P. Cotello shows up and sits at their table. Duke and Terry get into an argument over Fay, become noisy, and she leaves the Grill with Cotello—much to the annoyance of both sand hogs. Their fight is then continued with boxing gloves at Brandfort's gymnasium, where they put on a terrific scrap. But their differences remained unsettled.

CHAPTER VIII.

A NEW PROPOSITION.

MATT swore in great disgust. There are times when the truth hurts, and this was one of them. Some portion of the floor had not been solid when the air pressure was cut off. Ground water forcing up from below had seeped into the cylinder through the porous section and now formed a pool. The lock had been removed and sent aloft, and it was too late to put the pressure on again. A long, hollow tube of metal extended one hundred feet straight up to the ground level, and at the bottom of it stood Matt and Big Swede, water nearly to their knees and unpleasant thoughts for company.

"What next?" asked Matt, as he tilted his head to stare up the narrow column. Every lamp but one had been smashed and a tiny patch of blue sky marked the top of the cylinder. Slightly above their heads the single glowing bulb blinked from its place behind a ladder rung.

"We go up," said Big Swede, "and Duke he raise hell."

"Wisdom from a fool, but I can think of nothing else. Up with ye, me son."

Big Swede started slowly up the ladder, his feet clumping solidly on each rung and hands reaching upward. His head and shoulders passed the lamp, and Matt started after him.

Plop! One of Big Swede's boots ground against the lamp, and the cylinder was a dark—very dark—hole. A howling cry broke from Big Swede's throat.

His hands jerked convulsively—his legs stiffened and he shot downward squarely on McCarthy's head.

The additional burden was too much for the Irishman, and he pitched backward and splashed into the water. For a moment there was a wild churning and threshing of arms. Gaelic curses and Scandinavian epithets rocketed aloft. It was any man's guess as to what was happening in the bottom of the cylinder for the space of sixty seconds.

At length came order out of chaos. Big Swede righted himself and leaned against the wall. Matt squatted in the pool of water and rubbed his head. His neck had a crick in it, his back felt as though it were made of glass, a huge lump rose suddenly upon his head, and two teeth were loose.

"Explain!" he shouted. "Explain yerself, immediate—or I'll rend you limb from limb."

"It bit me!" said Big Swede.

"What bit you—and why?"

"By golly, I don't know. I go up—it bites—I go down—ya."

"There's no doubt in me mind at all about the *down* part. But as fer the bite—fiddlesticks!"

Matt grasped the rungs of the ladder and swung slowly upward. He made the first rung—the second—the third—and repeated Big Swede's backward leap with a few embellishments. His shout was louder; his arms waved faster; and he hit harder.

Down they went with a liquid swoosh into the water. Again came a churning and threshing of arms. And at last there was peace.

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"'Tis the electric wire—you jabberwock!" he cried.

"What do that be?" asked Big Swede.

"The wire?"

"No—jabberjabber. I don't know him, no."

"T'hell with you and the jabberwock. How would I know what it is? Now get up there and undo the mischief you've done or I'll bite yer ears off."

"Sure—I fix him, you bet," said the Swede, and started gingerly up the ladder.

There was a moment of silence as his huge hand reached slowly about, searching for the cable. The tungsten wires in the smashed lamp had been twisted back upon the wet cable, forming a contact and sending a trickle of electricity along the drenched rubber. The entire cable was alive, humming with current.

"*Yoooow!*"

BIG SWEDE had found the cable and was telling the world. His wet hands on the iron rungs made a perfect contact, and he bucked like a rodeo rider after a prize. Matt could see little of the exhibition, but the sound effects told him that all was not well with his friend.

He reached up, intent upon grabbing the Swede by the boot heels and dragging him from danger. His hands fastened about an ankle and a thousand torments racked his body.

Knee deep in the water, he had improved the contact made by Big Swede. And through this human chain the electricity galloped into the ground.

They swung and twitched, buckled and leaped, and in one gyration the Swede's hands wrenched loose from the cable.

"Awooof!" said Matt, and sank wearily into the water.

"Ooooop!" said Big Swede, and reclined beside him.

One hundred feet above, Red Scully, the sand hog who had been stationed at the rim of the cylinder to attend the needs of the men below, listened in wonderment to the chorus of helps and cries that drifted up to him. He scratched at the nape of his neck as though in doubt, leaned far over the rim, and peered into the darkness.

"What's the matter down there?" he cried.

The answer that lifted through the tube was a credit to McCarthy's vocabulary. It left nothing to the imagination. It was rare, spicy, and emphatic.

Red laughed heartily and waved an arm to Duke, who was working at Number Three pit.

"Now what t'hell is wrong?" asked Corey.

"There's a short in the light cable. The boys are turning handsprings down there. Want to let them cool off a while or shall I take the juice off the wire and let them up?"

Duke leaned over the edge of the cylinder and cupped his hands to his mouth. There was a smile on his face for the first time this morning.

"Come on up, you two!" he cried. "That's no place for nonsense."

For a moment there was silence. Then the blending howls of the trapped men filled the cylinder. Duke listened approvingly for a time and signalled to Red to disconnect the cable. There was a period of silence and then came a slow, steady cursing that lifted as the sand hogs climbed.

"I'm practically killed," announced McCarthy as he dragged his drenched form from the pit.

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Big Swede climbed silently over the edge and seated himself on the ground. He looked from Duke to Matt and his face carried an expression that said more plainly than words, "Now you catch hell." He grinned.

"And now, my dear Mr. McCarthy," said Duke with biting sarcasm, "there seems to be a little moisture on your clothes. Could there possibly be a leak in the cylinder?"

"Go to the divil," growled Matt. "Of course there's a leak."

"Fine. You'll find some lead wool, a chisel and a hammer in the tool box. With these you can caulk up the leaks after you bale the water out of the cylinder. Now, get going, you apes! The concrete will be here in a half hour."

Matt and Big Swede nodded sorrowful agreement, and Duke left them to return to Number Three pit. The bottom section of a cylinder was in place and the hose lines were being hooked up. Near by, in Number Two, Terry and his men were working steadily down toward bed rock.

At such times that Duke stopped beside the pit, the men had little to say, and it was becoming more evident with every hour that a definite split had occurred in the gang.

WHEN Duke called all hands to erect a wooden chute that led from the street level to Number One cylinder, the men who favored Terry looked first to him, as though awaiting his confirmation of the order before obeying. Duke noticed there were a dozen sand hogs in this group—more than half the men on the job. It was a direct challenge to his leadership, but there was nothing he could do about it. The men were taking his orders merely because Terry had nodded in agreement, but there was no snap to their work. The fierce spontaneity of the previous day was gone, and they were performing their duties in a routine fashion.

At the street level a large concrete truck had backed in through the gate. The body of the truck was shaped like a large steel drum, the back of which tapered cone-like to a small door. The drum rotated slowly, keeping the concrete within it in a plastic state. By this method, concrete that had been mixed at a large plant could be delivered to the job at a considerable saving.

At a signal from Duke, the truck driver pulled a lever that tilted the drum and sent a stream of liquid concrete spilling along the chute and into Number One cylinder. Matt and Big Swede had finished their work below and were standing at the edge of the pit watching the gray mass flowing into the bottom. It mounted steadily as one truck after another emptied their drums into the chute and at length the concrete swelled to the rim.

"And that's the end of Number One," said Matt happily. "Only nineteen more to go, Swede me son."

Swede grinned in agreement and poked at the mass with a long pole, puddling it and squaring off the top. Now a long, slender column of concrete enclosed within a tube of steel extended one hundred feet down to bed rock, a giant pedestal upon which later would be erected the steelwork of a towering building.

And Duke noticed with pleasure that something of the old spirit and thrill of accomplishment had come to the men as they saw this first evidence of their handiwork. He laughed and joked with them and sent them back to their jobs.

By nightfall Number Two had

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reached bed rock and Terry was sending out rotted rock from the bottom. Duke had started the third cylinder down under pressure and a fourth was being swung into place. The job was off to a fine start and save for the coolness between the two factions they seemed to be driving forward to certain success.

But Duke remembered Fay's warning that Cotello intended to strike again and before the men quit for the night, he had them erect a small shanty near the compressor and exacted a definite promise from both McCarthy and Big Swede that neither would leave the excavation that night. With them were four other sand hogs Scotty McLean, Jim Hopper, Mike Clemens and Austin Muldoon—all close friends of Duke Corey and men who would stop at nothing to carry this project through to completion. It would be rather unfortunate for Cotello, thought Duke, if he should decide to make a visit to the job that evening.

At first Duke had decided to spend the night in the excavation with the men but had been dissuaded from this plan by the loud protestations of McCarthy.

"Get home with you," shouted Matt. "And catch up with a little rest when you get there. Sure, all of us can take it easy tomorrow, but you, me son, must be on your toes. You'll be sinkin' Number Three and maybe Number Four too. G'wan to bed!"

DUKE agreed when Big Swede added his protests and after a thorough examination of the job, left for his hotel. A telephone had been hooked up at the shack and Matt promised faithfully that he would call Duke at the slightest sign of trouble.

Terry and his men had gone after a few perfunctory "Good nights." There had been no attempts made at a reconciliation—in fact, the group seemed to have become more sullen, and Duke realized that Terry had some definite plan in progress.

At the hotel, he showered and dressed carefully. He hurried through his dinner and walked across town to Fay's home on Park Avenue. He smiled when he realized it was probably the most expensive apartment in New York and compared it ruefully with the many odd places he had been forced to live during his years of construction work.

There was that cheap hotel in Antwerp that had been his home for six months while a tunnel was being driven beneath the Scheldt River—a tin-roofed shanty in Mexico—another, equally as uncomfortable in South America that had housed him and his gang for a year—a waterfront room in San Francisco during the time it took to put down caissons for the Golden Gate Bridge—these places and many more had been his home.

And now Fay, who had been reared in such magnificent surroundings as unlimited money could supply, had decided he was to be her husband. The thought sent him off into gales of laughter, and the doorman looked at him in doubt, remembering is experience of the previous evening with two other huge men who had laughed.

Fay held up her mouth to be kissed when she opened the door of her apartment. But Duke gripped her by the shoulders, shook her lightly and laughed again.

"Behave yourself," he said.

"Why all the hilarity?" she asked. "And *why* don't I get kissed?"

"Because we're both crazy. You

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are, when you talk about playing wife to a sand hog. And I am, when I listen."

She closed one eye tightly and squinted up at him with the other, scratching her chin in imitation of Matt McCarthy when the huge Irishman was puzzled. Slipping an arm around his waist she led him into the library and grinned to an elderly man who was seated near the center table, reading a magazine.

"Dad," she said. "This is him. Isn't he nice?"

"I'm not sure that 'nice' is quite the word," laughed Mr. Morley and rose to extend his hand to Duke. "But I'll admit he is different from the usual male that I find in your company." He pointed to a chair and a decanter. "Let's sit and drink—that always helps."

"Always," agreed Duke, thankful for the ease with which Mr. Morley had led him from an awkward situation.

"I sent for him, Duke," said Fay. "I wired him that he was going to have a brand new son-in-law and he better come North and get acquainted. That brought him running."

"I should think it would," said Duke, and smiled to Mr. Morley. "But really, sir—you don't need to be alarmed."

"Do I look as though I were alarmed?" asked Mr. Morley.

"Well—I put that a little bluntly. What I mean is there will be no new son-in-law. I'll admit I did ask Fay to marry me, but I realize now just how impossible that is."

"A gallant lie," said Morley, smiling. "But a lie, nevertheless. You've had nothing to do with it—in fact, I doubt if you knew you were to marry Fay."

"Yes, he did," said Fay. "I told him this morning."

"Nice of you," said Morley, and reached up to pat her cheek.

FAY was sitting on the arm of his chair, running a hand through his closely cropped gray hair. She had lifted his glasses that were attached to a long black cord and she was twirling them about one finger. Duke noticed the strong family resemblance in the two faces, the light blue eyes, the firm chin and aggressive tilt of the head.

He knew that Rupert Morley had amassed a fortune through sheer domination of those he came in contact with and he had no doubt but that Fay had likewise inherited this trait along with her father's features. Sitting before this dignified old gentleman, Duke felt as though he were a subject on a glass slide beneath a microscope. And he was thankful for the encouraging lift that the bourbon imparted.

"And what do you think of Fay's idea?" asked Morley.

"That's rather a stiff question," said Duke. "Suppose I answer it this way—I've never been quite so flattered in my life, but that just about sums it up. My income would almost keep her in gloves and handkerchiefs. In a month she'd hate me and in two months she'd divorce me. If we talk about something else for five minutes she'll forget she ever mentioned it and tomorrow she'll be on her way to France or Southampton."

Rupert Morley leaned his head against Fay's shoulder and laughed until tears streamed down his cheeks. Fay sat bolt upright and stared at Duke from eyes that were slitted. Then she slipped to her feet, stepped quickly beside Duke and kissed him.

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"That's to prove you're a fool," she said and walked from the room.

"Sorry, Corey," said Morley at length. "You'll never get away with it. Fay makes up her mind in a hurry but I've never known her to change it. And out of a few hundred odd men you are the only one I've know her to run after. Give up, son. She'll have her own way in the end."

"Good Lord!" cried Duke. "You don't suppose I *enjoy* talking like this? I'd give an arm to marry her—but—but it just can't be."

"Suppose you tell me something about your work?" suggested Morley.

"As a prospective son-in-law?"

"Not at all. Let's forget all that for the time. Fay has told me a little about this project of yours and it sounds mighty interesting. Sort of co-operative concern, isn't it?"

"That just about covers it," said Duke. "We've incorporated—the stock is evenly divided and we're doing our first job. If we put it across, we'll be a going concern with a chance to make some real money. If we don't—we're licked."

"You used be one of Martin & Rangers' superintendents, if I'm not mistaken?"

"That's right," said Duke. "Worked with them for years."

"How do they take to all this?"

"They don't. I'm through so far as they are concerned—and so are the men. For that matter, we're listed as radicals in the trade. It's a case of put this across or get out of compressed air work."

"Who's job is this you are on now?"

"Haggerty Construction Company sub-let the cylinder work to us."

"Are they satisfied?" asked Morley.

"Apparently. They make the first payment when we put down five cylinders and Haggerty agreed to give me a crack at a caisson job in South America if we finish on schedule."

MORLEY refilled the glasses, pushed a box of cigarettes closer to Duke and settled back in his chair to listen attentively. Duke talked for the better part of an hour, explaining in detail the difficulties of the work and the method in which Cotello was trying to block them.

He told of his dreams of a firm owned exclusively by the men who faced the dangers of compressed air work. He spoke of the trust that the sand hogs had placed in him, and of other jobs on which he had faced death with these same men.

The picture he painted was none too bright and in it there was a promise of months of hard work at starvation prices. The money they earned would of necessity go back into the firm for quite some time to come and if at the end of a year's struggle they met with success, there would then be some real recompense.

Morley asked questions at times and at length could agree with Duke on all points save one.

"You are not taking any pay for your brains," he protested. "Granted, you and the men do an equal amount of work. For this you should share equally in the receipts. But you are doing all the planning—all the brain work. You should receive a larger share."

"I'm getting it," said Duke. "Not in money—but in the sheer joy of knowing that I am helping a lot of unfortunate devils who otherwise would never have received a break. That's big pay, Mr. Morley—damn big pay."

"You'll never own a yacht, that way," laughed Morley.

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"No—but I'll have a swell time in a sailboat. And I'll never run short of friends."

"Maybe you're right, Corey. It must be nice to have friends. I have very few—too few. I could use a lot more. How about letting me in on this deal?"

"How?" asked Duke.

"Well, I'm a bit old to handle a shovel but I could supply some necessary capital. And I think you will admit I can chip in some business sense. Most of the construction outfits would be glad to have me with them. How about it?"

"Honestly, I don't know," said Duke. "Suppose I put it up to the men and let you know tomorrow?"

"It's a deal," said Morley and extended his hand.

"Well, thank goodness that's over," said Fay from the doorway. "As a Romeo you certainly have much to learn, Duke. I was nice enough to stay out of sight and let you two jabber away for an hour.

"The least you can do, Dad, is to take a walk or something and let Duke make love to me."

"One of the nice things about Fay," said Morley, "is her shy and retiring manner. She didn't get enough spankings in her youth."

"Good-by, Dad," she said, and ruffled his hair.

He shook hands with Duke, reminded him of their deal, cuffed Fay affectionately on the ear, and left the library. Fay dropped down onto the arm of Duke's chair and grinned at him.

"Commence," she said.

"Commence what?" he asked.

"Making love, of course."

"If you're still in circulation a year from today, I'll take you up on that," he promised. "Just now I'm afraid it would be a little out of order."

"Duke Corey," she said severely, "when I make up my mind to be kissed I don't intend to wait a year for results."

CHAPTER IX.

DISSENSION.

AND when Duke left the apartment much later in the evening he decided that Fay knew quite definitely what she wanted and had an effective way of getting results. He had passed the door of his hotel and was wandering quite happily toward the job before he realized it might be well to get some sleep. He grinned ruefully, retraced his steps and marched, whistling, into the hotel.

There was an excited gathering of sand hogs when Duke arrived at the excavation. They were grouped about a second thundering compressor that belched clouds of gray smoke into the morning air. Perched upon the platform that held the machine, Matt McCarthy wiped deftly at grease spots on the shining metal and expounded volubly upon the merits of two compressors. He had run hose lines from the machine to Number Two and Three pits, and they were pulsing with life at the thrust of the air.

Matt laughed happily in reply to the storm of questions and surveyed the gathering sand hogs like a king from his throne. Big Swede was lugging tins of gasoline and storing them beneath the platform. His face was wreathed in a huge grin and he paused occasionally to wink knowingly to Matt.

"Where the hell did this come from?" asked Duke in surprise. "Who ordered another compressor?"

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"How would I guess?" asked Matt. "Didn't you?"

"I did not, and damn well you know it. When did it get here?"

"About an hour ago," said Matt. "It was a great surprise to all of us, but Matthew McCarthy is not the man to ask questions. Not me! Sez I to meself, 'Duke has sent us another machine,' and I hooked it up."

"You didn't lose much time about it," said Duke, and hurried to the phone. "Who delivered it?"

"The same outfit that sent us the first."

Duke put through a call to the company and demanded an explanation. The answer brought an expression of bewilderment to his face. He turned to the men.

"They say that a party came in there yesterday and rented the compressor. Ordered it sent here and paid a month in advance. Any of you know about this?"

Terry Braid had joined the crowd and grinned sarcastically at Duke.

"Santa Claus, maybe," he suggested.

"I'm not kidding, Braid," said Duke. "I don't know a thing about it." He turned to Matt, who was staring innocently at the morning sky. "Come clean, Irishman—what's the answer?"

"Since the machine is here—let's use it. Fer that matter, we *are* usin' it," said Matt.

"Ya," said Big Swede. "She go like hell, you bet."

"You two eggs are up to something," said Duke. "You might as well spill it now, before I get rough."

"Maybe it's a little love token," said Terry, and winked to the men.

"What do you mean by that crack, Braid?" asked Duke.

"Can't you guess?" said Terry.

"No—you tell me, wise guy."

"LISTEN, Corey, this is spreading it a bit too thick. You know damn well Fay rented that machine—paid for it and sent it here. I don't know just what the angle is, but it ties right in with the rest of the setup."

"Keep talking, Braid. I still don't get you."

"With pleasure. I've been doing a little figuring of my own, and I've got a few questions you might be able to answer. First, how about that appointment with Cotello? He seemed sure of a welcome and he was damn sure you'd set a price. You didn't by any chance expect to see him alone at the hotel after I went out, did you?"

"Go on," said Duke.

"You're damn right, I will. Why were you so anxious about his health? Why didn't you want me to smack him around? And why did you arrange a nice little scrap between us so that I couldn't follow him? Was Fay winding up the deal for you?"

"Anything else?" asked Duke. His face was white and he was holding his hands at his sides with an effort. He realized that Terry's questions sounded logical to the men—it looked like a sell-out to Cotello. It was circumstantial evidence, but each piece fitted perfectly with another. Terry was branding him a crook and in such a way that explanation might be futile.

"Yes, there's a little more," said Braid. "This compressor gag is the pay-off. It's supposed to show Cotello that he has to bid high—talk real money to make you quit. Then when he comes through, you'll give the men a spiel about, 'We're licked. Let's take what we can get and quit. Maybe we'll

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have another little accident to make it all seem kosher. Then you get a nice slice and we get pennies."

"That all, Braid?"

"Just about."

"Swell—now it's my turn," said Duke. "To begin with, you're no good, Braid. And when I get finished telling you, I'm going to get a great kick beating hell out of you. But to put the men straight, here's the answers you want. I had no appointment with Cotello—couldn't have had. I didn't know you were going out until Fay called. As for setting a price for a sell-out, I could have done that before we started digging, and the price would have been just as high. You want to know why I didn't let you follow Cotello and why I fought with you? That's easy. I wanted to rub your ears off—same as I do now."

"How about the compressor?" asked one of the men.

"I've told you the truth," said Duke. "I know nothing about it, and it's going back today."

"'Tis the like of you, Terry Braid," shouted McCarthy, "that spiles everything. You'd take the good out of a blessing and make it a curse. Sure, the little girl sent us the machine—and it was me that rigged the deal with her. Duke knew naught of it, you—"

"Me, too," added Swede. "I fix things, ya. Matt don't know much 'bout compressor—how to get it. I fix that good so she get it. Now, by Gar, I fix you, Terry. I fix you so you stay dead."

HIS eyes were narrow and his lips were tight. Seldom had the men seen Big Swede without his customary smile. He worked with it, talked with it, and even fought with it. Some swore that he smiled while he slept. Just an easy, good-natured grin that seemed part of the man. But now it was gone. His breath was coming in long gulps as though it were an effort. His hands were doubled into great fists as he walked slowly toward Terry.

"Stop that, Swede!" yelled Duke.

"I fix ya," said Swede, and kept going.

Matt McCarthy leaped from his perch on the compressor and landed full upon the Swede's back. They crashed to the ground and Matt struggled to a position astride Big Swede's chest.

"Why you do that?" asked Swede in surprise.

"Would ye be after startin' a free-fer-all that would end the job completely?" cried Matt. "Use yer head—you big Scowegian. Will you stay put or must I bend a wrench over yer thick skull?"

"You don't want me to fix?"

"I do not!"

"All right—I don't fix—today."

Matt climbed to his feet and Big Swede followed him. Some of the men who were grouped about Terry Braid were moving restlessly. They looked doubtfully from Terry to Duke and then to the men who were ranged solidly beside him. Muldoon and Clemens stood at his right and left hand, and these two were fighters. Older than any of the men of Braid's group, but rugged veterans of a thousand battles.

There was not the slightest wavering in their attitude—they trusted Duke and meant to stick with him. Hopper and Red Scully were grinning, and they eyed the men of Terry's group as so many schoolboys who were about to be punished. Scotty McLean was staring at Braid, watching his every move and measuring the distance

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between them. None doubted Scotty's stand in this argument.

"You've got your answer, Braid," said Duke.

"I've been listening to a lot of words," said Terry. "They sound good—maybe you can match them with a little action."

"I'll enjoy that," said Duke, and moved forward.

Matt McCarthy was between them. A heavy Stillson wrench was in his right hand. His eyes were flaming, and a drawn, tight expression was in his face. His head was down and he weaved from the shoulders.

"Stand back—the two of ye!" he growled. "Lord knows, I love a fight, but there'll be none this morning. As fer you, Duke Corey—shame on your head! Shame, I say!"

At any other time the words would have seemed ridiculous and brought a burst of laughter from the men. But now they were received with a deathly silence.

"Are we children?" he continued. "Are we fools, to fling away our one big chance for the sake of a few blows? The past ten years should have taught all of ye what sort of a man ye've got fer a leader. Have ye ever known him to be dishonest? Have ye?" Matt was shouting now—staring the men down with a growing fierceness. "And *you*, Terry Braid—since when have you begun to doubt him? Not long, I'll bet. Not until a certain little lady thought him the better man."

TERRY shifted slightly, easing his weight onto one foot, tightening the muscles of his shoulders. Matt's eyes narrowed and he lifted the wrench slowly.

"Don't move, Terry, me son," he warned. "If ye do, 'twill be yer last. I'll talk some sense into that head of yours, or by the saints, I'll beat it in. Ye've done some bad talkin', but ye're not the first man to go sour because of a woman. I don't hold it ag'in' ye, lad. Now listen to McCarthy and do as he sez. Call Cotello on the phone. Stall him, tell him anything you like, but get him here. Tell him we're licked, and he will come runnin'. And when he gets here—'tis Matthew McCarthy will get the truth from him—with this wrench, if need be."

Terry looked at his men. Matt's speech had done something to them that Duke's logical explanation had failed to do. They were primitive, hard-fisted laborers whose emotions were swayed by the fiery outburst, and always these emotions ruled.

They were ashamed of their defection and anxious to atone for it. Fred Schmidt, a miner who had been the first to follow Terry, was now heading toward Number Two pit. He climbed above the rim, looked at the group for a moment, and said, "Let's go to work."

Others followed him, going about their duties silently and with shamefaced grins. Soon there was none left by the compressor but Terry and Duke.

McCarthy had crawled up to his perch and Big Swede was with him.

"Want to put in that call?" asked Duke quietly.

"The hell with it," said Braid. "I'm through."

"Can't take it, eh?"

"You know better than that, Corey. But I know when I'm licked. There isn't room enough on this job for both of us."

"You're wrong, Terry," said Duke. "Our chances of putting this deal across went up fifty per cent when you

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joined us. I'd be a liar if I said we don't need you. We do. And I'm asking you to stick."

For a moment Terry stood in indecision. Then he turned and walked toward Number Four pit.

"We'll be needing air on this one in an hour," he said, and Duke nodded in agreement.

Matt McCarthy was smiling broadly when Duke climbed up beside him. He winked and poked Corey in the ribs and then pointed to the pulsing machine.

"Ain't she the daisy?" he asked.

"Shut it down," ordered Duke. "We'll run with the old one, Matt. We're not taking charity on this job."

"Ye stubborn divil," shouted Matt, but he shut down the machine. "Must I tell the child you don't like her present?"

Duke did not answer. He walked to Number Three and climbed down to the lock. Clemens and Scully were working in the bottom, and he sent Clemens to join Terry.

Stripped to the waist, he swung his shovel in rapid strokes tearing at the sand with a savage intensity, fighting it, heaving it up through the opening above in a swift flowing stream. For a solid hour he worked without pausing for breath, worked for the sheer joy of working—losing himself in the labor.

It is hard to think when tons of air pressure are draining the life from your system, when a howling blast of compressed air is fanning your back with a scorching breath in a steel-walled tube that is sinking slowly through the earth to a depth of a hundred feet. Duke did not want to think. His mind was a muddle of confused thoughts. Whenever there came a letup in the work these thoughts tortured him.

RUPERT MORLEY had made him a proposition that would have come as a godsend to the sand hogs under ordinary conditions. To tell them of it now would again fill their minds with doubt. They were simple men, hard working and industrious. They knew little about finance and cared less. Duke's figures and facts had been accepted without questions, and he knew when he talked of them the sand hogs were but half listening.

He had tried to explain the equal distribution of stock to the men, and Red Scully had summed it up briefly when he said, "When you talk about more than a thousand dollars, it's just a bunch of figures to me. I never was good at figures—t' hell with it. We trust you."

But Duke knew the name of Rupert Morley would suggest wealth to the men. All of them had a natural distrust of wealth. It was inherent—bred into them through generations of laboring parents. They were not antagonistic to it, but they simply did not understand it and wanted nothing to do with anyone of that class.

After the affair with Terry Braid this morning it would be disastrous to suggest Morley as a partner. Duke had not worked with these men for years without learning that lesson. He wiped the sweat from his face and again tore into the sand.

Number Two cylinder had reached bed rock, the locks had been removed, and it was ready for the concrete.

Number Four was sinking rapidly as Terry and Clemens sent buckets of sand hurtling up through the lock. Muldoon had joined them, and the

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three men were making fast time. In Number Three, Duke and Red Scully had long since broken through the hard crust of earth and were well down into the sand.

The fourth section had been bolted to the tube—eighty feet of circular black wall extended above them. Thirty-six pounds of air pressure thrust against each square inch of sand below them, forcing down the water and at times bursting through small openings in the bottom. Fog filled the working chamber, heavy white folds of mist that blinded the men and masked their movements. Moisture dripped constantly from the roof in splashing drops that were heated almost to the boiling point.

Duke slashed at the sand, sending it over his shoulder in a steady stream. Red was in the upper chamber loading buckets and sending them out. When he had cleared the lock he climbed down to the bottom and for the first time that day found Duke standing motionless.

"Tired?" he asked, and grinned.

Duke did not answer but tilted his head inquiringly toward the air pipe. Scully listened and his eyes widened.

"Again?" he said, and stared at Duke.

CHAPTER X.

FIRE!

MATT McCARTHY sat moodily upon his perch on the old compressor. His eyes were upon the new machine that was standing idle at the far end of the excavation. He had shut it down but stubbornly had refused to disconnect the hose lines. He saw Big Swede dragging a huge canvas cover over the glistening metal, and grinned at the evident displeasure in his partner's face. Here they had gone to all the trouble of arranging a pleasant surprise, and Duke had spoiled everything by refusing it.

"Ah, well," mused Matt, "we'll have a talk with the little darlin' and maybe she can pound some sense into his head." He smiled again at the slowness of Big Swede's movements and a puzzled frown sent a hand to his chin where the large fingers scratched in amazement. Swede's head was tilted back and he was staring up at the roof of an adjoining building. His mouth was open as though he were about to shout. His hands had let go of the canvas and were waving.

"Now what the divil ails the Scowegian?" grumbled Matt. "He looks as if he had seen a—"

A tearing explosion smothered the remaining words.

Scarlet flame vomited from the gas tanks of the compressor. It fanned upward into the sky, spread in a blazing wave that broke and showered livid tongues of fire about the excavation. The crash of the blast rocketed against the walls of near-by buildings, doubling and throbbing. It thundered back across the opening in a giant echo that rumbled and groaned.

Flames licked at timbers that spread fanlike against the adjoining buildings. Instantly the crackle of fire on dry wood lifted above all other sounds.

Black smoke rose in a roaring cloud that billowed and swept out onto the street. Through it the yellow flames danced and twisted. The excavation was a howling inferno from which came the cries and screams of men.

Matt McCarthy was hurled headlong through space. He crashed against a brick wall and slumped to the ground. For an instant he remained in a twitch-

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ing heap. His clothes were smoldering and his face was a red horror. Then he was on his feet, stumbling, lurching toward the new compressor.

The canvas cover was blazing and Big Swede was tearing it to shreds as he ripped it from place. He was cursing and yelling, beating at the flames with his huge hands, stamping on them. babbling and shouting meaningless words. Matt lurched past him, dragging himself onto the platform near the engine. Swede joined him and they started the motor.

It sprang into life, adding the thunder of its exhaust to the mad mixture of sound. McCarthy was blind, pawing about with groping hands, performing his duties by the sense of touch alone.

"Open them lines, Swede!" he screamed. "Get air on Three and Four —hurry, man!"

Big Swede grabbed a wrench and swung open the valves that would send pressure hurtling through the emergency lines. When the black hoses leaped with life he turned to face McCarthy.

"You be all right?" he yelled.

"T' hell with me!" shouted Matt. "Get the men out of them cylinders!"

BIG STEVE grunted and rushed toward Number Three. He had taken but a few steps when he stopped suddenly, spun on his heels, and plunged at a burning timber that was stretched across a hose line. Flames were licking at the rubber.

Black smoke curled upward from the sizzling stuff in a thin line. Swede coughed, grasped the flaming wood in his huge paws and cast it aside. His eyes ran quickly along the length of the lines. Other timbers had fallen on top of them and flame was biting at the rubber in a half dozen spots.

"Hi, you hogs!" he cried to the men who were wandering blindly about the excavation. "Clear them lines—you bet!"

Instantly the sand hogs realized the seriousness of his warning. The pressure that streamed through these hoses was the only hope of the men in the cylinders. Without it the heavy iron tubes would sink into the quicksand, carrying the trapped men with them. Scotty McLean rushed forward. The platform of the old compressor was a blazing pyre. Close to it a throbbing black line extended in a long loop from the new machine to Number Three cylinder. The rubber was afire, hissing and spluttering, and the flames were creeping swiftly around the loop.

Scotty snatched up a shovel and sent a stream of sand flying onto the hose. He worked in, closer and closer to the platform. Heat from the blazing gas scorched his face, his clothes smoked, and the blade of his shovel showed scarlet with the reflected flame.

Big Swede had gripped the hose line beneath one arm and was dragging it away from the fire. His heels churned the sand, his back was bent, and the veins were blue streaks across his forehead.

"Pull him away, Scotty!" he cried. "Get those lines away from there!"

Scotty bent to lift the heavy line. He gathered it in his arms and lurched forward. From behind him came the sound of tearing wood. He looked back. The platform was swaying beneath the weight of the huge compressor. It tilted—hung for a moment on its outer supports, and crashed.

A wild scream split the smoke. Scotty had disappeared beneath the flaming mass of wood and steel. But even as he fell his last frantic thrust had hurled the line clear. It was sliding

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across the ground in answer to the steady pull of Big Swede.

Only when it was clear did Big Swede turn. He stared at the wreckage. He lifted a hand as though he were waving to a departed friend and then grabbed a shovel. Sand thudded against the hose and smothered the flames.

The other men were ranging along the lines, clearing them, beating out the fires and hauling them farther from the blazing timbers. Big Swede clambered over the side of Number Three and started down. He reached the top of the locks and pounded furiously against the metal.

DUKE and Red Scully had gazed at the silent air pipe in horrid fascination when the pressure stopped. For the space of a minute neither moved nor spoke. Then Duke pointed to the ladder.

"Up with you, Red," he ordered.

"Right," said Red, and clambered up into the lock.

Duke followed him and crouched on the floor, one hand holding the bottom door nearly closed while they waited and listened.

Both smiled when the air blasted into the chamber again and Duke let the door swing down.

"Guess we're both jumpy," grinned Duke.

"You can't hate a guy for that, can you?" laughed Red.

They climbed down to the bottom and lifted their shovels. An acrid wave of smoke flooded in upon them from the air pipe. It caught at their throats, choking them and tearing at their lungs. Duke gripped Red by the shoulders and thrust him toward the ladder. He followed him again up to the lock and drew the door closed.

"Open the exhaust," he ordered, and as Red reached for the valve they heard the frantic pounding of Big Swede.

Pressure screamed from the lock and they crouched beneath the door, pulling at the handle impatiently. When it opened, Red climbed quickly and Duke followed him through the opening.

A thick curtain of smoke filled the tube and through it the blackened features of Big Swede appeared as those of a gargoyle.

"That whole damn place be on fire!" he yelled.

Duke leaped for the ladder. His legs drove upward at a terrific pace and his hands reached wildly for the rungs above. He sprawled over the rim and leaped to the ground.

Sirens and bells were mingling in a wild din on Wall Street. The fence had been torn away, and Duke saw pumpers and ladder trucks massed thickly along the curb. Firemen were feeding hose lines into the excavation down a series of ladders that had been placed at the forward wall.

Figures in black raincoats and helmets swarmed down the ladders, running toward the supporting timbers with axes and poles. Police were driving back a crowd that had collected and choked the street.

The distant scream of sirens told of more apparatus hurrying to the scene. To Duke it seemed that the air was a pulsing, throbbing mass of bells and sirens through which the crackle of flames bit and lashed.

"Where's the gang from Number Four?" he yelled to Big Swede.

"They don't come out yet."

"The rest all right?"

"Scotty be dead," said Swede. "Maybe Matt—I ain't sure. No one else."

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Duke rushed toward Number Four. Blazing gas had drenched the wooden sides of the pit below which extended the iron shell of the cylinder. The hay and timbers were burning fiercely, sending a column of fire upward in a twisting spiral. Firemen had set their lines and signalled for water, and a white column was pouring against the fire and dropping into the cylinder.

"Stop!" yelled Duke. "Don't use water! There are men in that cylinder!"

He grabbed at the line, forcing the spout upward and away from the pit. A black-coated figure thrust him aside and deflected the stream.

Duke wanted to explain. He wanted to tell them that water in that pit meant sure death to the men below. The battering stream would crumble the timbered walls and send an avalanche of earth and wood down into the tube.

The air line would be blocked, pressure cut off from the cylinder, and the heavily weighted iron shell would sink into the quicksand. He tried to talk. But the firemen saw his contorted face and judged him a maniac. They waved him away and brought up another line.

BIG SWEDE was cursing and yelling. He saw a fireman swing at Duke and he went mad. His arms whirled and his head went down. He charged into the group like a tornado.

"Ho!" he cried, and drove his fist against a fireman's jaw. "You kill those guys, ya!"

The other sand hogs were at it in an instant. They, too, realized that explanations took time. Nor were they in a mood for talk. Smoke was thick about them. Flames licked up at them from the blazing walls. The stench of burning rubber was heavy on the air.

One water hose had broken loose from the hands of a pipeman who had been felled by Big Swede. The brass nozzle was whipping madly about, smashing against arms and chests, bowling the men over like tenpins.

"Drive them back, men!" shouted Duke, and smashed his fists against a fireman's jaw.

More men were swarming down the ladders. With them came blue-coated police, heading for the battling sand hogs with swinging clubs. The fight had gone too far for words to stop it. Reason and sanity had vanished when the first blows were struck. The firemen thought they were dealing with madmen. And they were not far off in their judgment.

The sand hogs saw in these rain-coated figures men who were trying to kill their friends trapped in the pit below. They raged like beasts, swinging shovels and wrenches in murderous strokes.

Police whistles shrilled and more men were added to the fight. The hose lines that were attacking the blazing timbers serving as supports on the building walls had brought that fire under control. Chemical extinguishers had smothered the blaze at the compressor.

Gushing streams of water made a circle about the thundering machine upon which Matt McCarthy held to his post. The biting smell of wet and smoldering wood filled the excavation. White smoke mingled with steam and lifted in a lazy cloud. There remained but one spot of flame in the area. And about this red pyre raged a bloody battle.

Police swung their clubs and drove forward against the shouting laborers. The sand hogs charged the hose line time and again. Always Duke was in

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the lead. He shouted to the firemen, begging them to stop the water, and backed his words with hammering fists.

Four firemen had left the compressor and were carrying chemical extinguishers toward the pit. Duke shouted and pointed to these, nodding his head in violent agreement. A club had opened a deep gash above one eye, two police officers were clinging to his arms. He wrenched free. There was just one way to make them understand—a way that only a fool or a sand hog would try.

He rushed to the edge of the pit, charging against two men with a water line and knocking them aside. He bent down, wrapped his arms about the black hose line and lowered himself into the blazing shaft.

"He's crazy as hell!" shouted a fireman.

"No!" yelled Big Swede. "He get those fellow, ya! You stop those damn water!"

LIVID flame whipped against Duke's naked back. It seered and burnt, sending a thousand torments streaking through his body. His fingers could not grip the molten rubber of the hose casing, and he plunged downward, tearing at the slippery stuff, hugging it closely to his chest. A blinding wave of heat encircled him, smoke was thick in his throat. He slammed heavily against the burning timbers, twisting and turning in a mad dance that seemed without end.

Suddenly he was past the flames. The black iron walls of the cylinder whirled before his eyes. He was in the upper section that had sunk to the base of the wooden walled pit. He squeezed his arms tightly, checking the speed of his descent. His feet jabbed out at the walls and he crashed into a pool of water on the roof of the lock.

The door was closed, buried beneath three feet of water. He stamped against the roof with his boot heel, signalling to those within to release the pressure. There was no answer, and he bent down and searched for the emergency valve located in the roof. His fingers closed about the handle and he pulled it open.

Air belched through the layer of water, sending it high in a foaming stream. Spray blinded him, and he dashed an arm across his eyes. The pressure was quickly exhausted and the door dropped down. Water flooded into the lock, rushing through the opening and splashing down upon the floor beneath.

Fire had fused the light cable and the lock was in partial darkness. A sudden blaze from above sent a flickering light into the chamber. Two men were slumped at the foot of the ladder. Another was doubled against the far wall. Duke lowered himself to the floor and bent above them. Muldoon was draped across Terry's shoulders. His eyes were closed and his head hung limp.

Terry's right hand was gripping a rung above his head. His feet were thrusting at the sandy floor. He was pushing, shoving, struggling to stand erect with his burden and climb. He stared at Duke with eyes that were wild.

"Can't jam him — through — the door," he gasped. "Tried twice—water came and I closed—door. Give me a lift."

"How about Clemens?" shouted Duke, pointing to the still figure near the wall.

"He's through — choked. Muldoon's breathing—I—"

He coughed and shook his head. The words would not clear his mouth and

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he looked upward and again thrust with his feet. Duke lifted the unconscious man from Terry's shoulders and pointed to the door above.

"Go up!" he cried. "I'll pass him to you!"

Terry clambered weakly up the rungs. His head drooped and knocked against the wall. His feet dragged. At length he reached the opening and crawled through. Duke, with the huge form of Muldoon across his shoulders, leaned for a moment and placed a hand against Clemens' naked chest. There was no heart movement and Duke turned to the ladder.

The dormant weight on his shoulders tore at the muscles in his arms. But one foot above the other he climbed slowly to the door. Bracing himself on the ladder rungs he shifted Muldoon's position until his head was centered in the opening above. He climbed another step and lifted.

Terry's arms were about Muldoon's shoulders and he was heaving and dragging in an effort to help. Slowly they hoisted the still form onto the roof on the lock and crouched there.

"What now?" gasped Terry.

Duke looked up. The chemicals had killed the blaze and from afar he heard Big Swede's voice bellowing an order.

"Back!" cried Swede and the sound echoed hollowly down the cylinder. "Get back—those walls cave in quick. Move, by Gar—I get this hook down!"

"I guess that tears it," said Duke slowly. "The timbers are breaking and we can expect a load of sand."

"Climb, you fool!" barked Terry. "You can make it!"

"So can you—but how about Muldoon?" said Duke and tried to grin.

"Don't be an idiot," said Terry. "I'd never make it to the top—I'm licked. Stop playing hero!"

"You, too, feller," said Duke and braced himself for the shock of descending timbers and sand.

CHAPTER XI.

ACCIDENT.

BOTH men realized the significance of Big Swede's yell. The timbers of the pit above the cylinder rim had been weakened by fire. The weight of the surrounding earth was bending them inward. Soon they would snap and a smothering deluge of sand would pour down the shaft.

There was a sharp ring of metal against metal and both men looked up. Hurtling down the shaft at terrific speed came the large hook of the hoist. And standing with one foot in the hook and his hands gripping the cable was Big Swede. The falling cable jerked to a stop above the two men and the Swede stepped off.

"You ain't dead, no?" he grunted. "Good—get on those hook—quick!"

"Great headwork, feller," said Duke and hoisted Muldoon from the floor. "Take him up, Swede."

Big Swede looked long at Corey and lifted the limp form from his arms. He slung Muldoon over his shoulder like a sack of meal and stepped into the hook. Duke's word was law.

"I send back those hook," he said and tilted his head to look up the shaft. "Hi-i-i-up!" he cried, and the cable drew taut and spun them aloft.

"Figured we could go out together," said Duke by way of explanation.

"Just how do you mean that?" asked Terry and a twisted grin split his lips.

"Either way," answered Duke.

They crouched close to the cylinder wall and waited. A thin shower of

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sand rained down upon them and occasionally a small stone clattered into the bottom. They heard a wild shout from above as Big Swede and his burden cleared the rim of the pit and Duke nodded in satisfaction. The sand was coming faster now and blackened pieces of wood were pelting against their bent shoulders. They huddled together, heads down and arms locked above the backs of each other's necks.

"Two to one we don't make it," said Terry.

"Make it three to one and it's a bet," answered Duke as the hook slammed against the iron walls.

Duke put his foot in the hook and bent down.

"Hop on," he said.

Terry swung across his shoulder and grasped the cable. Duke shouted a signal and they were lifted upward. The cable spun in a slow whirl and they plunged against the metal walls, stripping the skin from their backs and shoulders. At times a rung would strike them a hammer blow that nearly tore their hands from the wire, but they clung in desperation and always the hook rose.

A wild scream came from the rim of the pit and both men gripped tighter.

"You lose, Duke," said Terry.

A charred timber plunged past them. Behind it came others and suddenly a river of sand was pouring upon their heads. Stones, boards, lumps of earth and hay showered down upon them. A smothering rush of water mingled with the sand and beat against them like a giant wave. The cylinder was a huge drain into which poured the sweepings of the excavation when the crumbling walls had opened the way.

Terry's hands went limp. A stone had struck against his head and stunned him. Duke felt the body go slack on his shoulder and thrust one arm up and over Terry's hips. The fingers of the other were clenched in an iron grip about the cable. They spun upward, past the last section of cylinder and into the torrent of sand that spewed from the broken walls.

Another instant and they cleared the top. Shouts, cheers and wild cries greeted them, and as the hook settled lightly on the ground, Duke and his burden sprawled face down in the mud.

When Duke Corey opened his eyes he found a pert, white face close to his own. Fay was seated upon the wet ground of the excavation, his head pillowed upon her knees. Her hands were pressed against his forehead and she was whispering to him—phrases of anxiety and fear.

He smiled. It was nice to be alive, and those hands were soft and cool. Fay was a beautiful girl and she loved him? What more could any man want?

For a moment he made no effort to move. Then recollection swept over him. He strained forward, and every nerve in his body shrieked in protest.

"No, dear," said Fay. "Don't get up—don't try."

HE set his teeth and struggled erect. From his hips to shoulders he was swathed in bandages. Beside him, an ambulance doctor was attending to the needs of another sand hog. Raincoated firemen, police, reporters and a self-important group of city officials were ringed about him. He saw Rupert Morley helping Fay to her feet. He forced his way through the circle and stared about at the ruins of the job. Then he laughed—a low bitter laugh of defeat.

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Big Swede was standing beside him. His blond hair was singed and blackened, filth was plastered thick upon his body and there was a smear of blood upon his face.

His great arms were folded upon his chest and his lips parted in a mirthless grin.

"Gone to hell, ya," he said.

"How many were hurt?" asked Duke. "It's all sort of hazy—I don't remember."

"Scotty — he's dead for sure. Clemens, too. That Irisher, Matt—he don't die, I guess. He was burnt all up, but he don't die. Maybe four more hurt—that's all, ya."

"Where's Terry?"

"Him and those other guys—they all go to horspital. I don't let them take you. I think maybe you want to look around, ya."

"Thanks, Swede," said Duke.

Fay was beside him again, her arm about his waist and her eyes lifted to his in understanding. Rupert Morley left the group of officials and joined Duke.

"Didn't expect to see you alive again, Duke," he said. "Fay drove me down to see the job and we got here a few minutes after the fire started. Any idea what caused it?"

"Lord knows," said Duke. "I don't."

"Damn peculiar," said Morley. "I've spoken to some friends of mine and they are starting an investigation. Don't suppose it will do much good, but the least we can do is try. And now, although this is hardly a time to talk of it, did you find time to put my proposition to the men?"

"I don't understand. What proposition?"

"You're a fine business man," smiled Morley. "I mean the talk we had last night. Will they let me come in?"

"In to what?" said Duke shortly. "We're licked. The whole thing is shot to pieces."

"I wouldn't be too sure of that. Suppose you let me have a few words with the men."

He turned to the group of battered sand hogs who were standing silently near the wrecked compressor and called them together. He spoke quietly to a police official and the others in the excavation were herded toward the ladders. Fay stood beside Duke, smiling at times and holding tightly to his arm.

"Men," said Morley. "I want you to do a favor for me. All my life I've wanted to be associated with a crowd who would stick when the going got tough. Last night I asked Duke to talk things over with you and see if there were room for me in this outfit. As you know, he didn't get the opportunity. Now, how about it? Can I come in?"

"Can you work in forty pounds of air?" asked one of the men, grinning.

THERE was a low laugh from the sand hogs. They looked from one to another and some winked. Duke was surprised at their reaction. He had expected them to tell Morley to go to hell in no uncertain terms. They were licked and they knew it, but that meant nothing to this crew of hard-bitten adventurers. If Duke could gather up the shreds of their job they would keep on fighting. If not—well, they had made a fine stab at it.

But Morley's manner had found a strange welcome in the minds of this crew. He had spoken as one of them—asked for a chance to work with them. They were pleased but still a little skeptical.

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"I'll be sellin' you my share," said a miner, "for the price of a bottle of rye."

There was another laugh and Morley lifted a hand in protest.

"I'll bet you a case you call that off when you hear my offer," he said. "Things look tough but a few dollars will straighten out this mess. New timbers and a job of shoring—another compressor and a repair job on the old one—one week's work and we can be right back in the running. Haggerty, the man who sub-let this job to you, is a friend of mine. I think we can straighten things out with him. In fact, I know we can."

"Does that mean you would own the outfit?" asked a man whose head was wrapped in bandages.

"It means I would have an equal share with all the rest of you. I'll chip in my business knowledge and money against your skill and labor. Fair enough?"

"By Gar," shouted Big Swede, "I think you be one punk business man, ya."

And now the sand hogs howled. Morley looked at Swede and ruefully stroked the back of his head. Duke was smiling and Fay's fingers were making dents in his arm.

"You're wrong, Big Fellow," said Morley. "It's the best deal I ever put across. You can't place a valuation on friends. And to make twenty of them —say, I'm satisfied."

A little later, seated on the edge of a rough wooden bunk, Swede was industriously thumbing through the pages of the Manhattan telephone directory. Suddenly he grunted and stabbed a huge thumb at a name, placed the book carefully on the bunk and lifted the receiver.

He shouted a number into the phone and waited patiently until the connection was made. And grinned when he recognized the voice that answered.

The first ray of morning sunlight found Big Swede perched comfortably on a pile of timber near the curb. He had washed away the stains of the previous day's battle with the fire and a clean white undershirt was tucked into his new overalls. At times he lifted a can of water to his lips and drank deeply, then he would grunt and stare at the pavement.

A large car drew to a stop near the timber, the chauffeur opened the door and a dapper individual stepped to the sidewalk. He was dressed carefully in a light gray business suit and an expensive Panama hat was tilted rakishly across one eye. He surveyed the scene of destruction beneath him, then turned and approached Big Swede.

"Where's Corey?" he asked.

"Hello, Cotello," said Big Swede. "You get here early, ya."

"You told me to make it before eight," said Cotello and glanced at his watch. "It's seven-thirty, now."

"Matt say you would come runnin' when you hear we are licked. He was right, ya."

"I'm sorry to hear you boys had so much trouble. But that's the breaks. Sometimes you win and sometimes you lose—that's business, Swede. Hope there was no one hurt."

HE followed Big Swede down the ladder and started toward the door of the shack.

"Where's every one?" he asked. "This joint is quiet as a tomb. Corey inside there?"

"Quiet, ya. Like grave they put Scotty in soon. Almost they put Matt in those grave, too. But that Irisher is tough. He get well."

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"So you had a killing, eh? Too bad—but then, the sand hogs are used to that. Expect to lose a few men on every job. It's the breaks."

"Ya, sand hogs don't think much about guys gettin' killed," said Big Swede. "That's damn right, Cotello."

"All right, Swede—I haven't got all day to talk about your hard luck. By the looks of this job you've had plenty and anything I give you to quit will be found money. Where's Corey?"

"Duke and me be all alone this morning," said Big Swede slowly. "He went down Number Two. Come on, we get him."

They crossed to the rim of Number Two cylinder that was flush with the floor of the excavation. A yawning black hole extended straight down a distance of one hundred feet to bed rock. The locks had been removed and the light wire drawn up. The pit was a slender column of darkness that seemed to taper to a black point at the bottom.

Swede leaned over the rim, cupped a hand to his mouth and shouted.

"Hi, down there," he called. "Cotello is here. He want to see you."

He listened for a moment and turned to the contractor.

"They be waiting for you," he said slowly and his arms went out.

"*Who?*" yelled Cotello. "*Who were you talking to?*"

"Those fellow you send to hell yesterday," said Big Swede and his arms closed about Cotello.

Fay drove Duke to the hospital early in the morning and in her arms was a large box of flowers for Terry.

They found Terry propped up in bed, reading an account of the fire in the morning papers. Muldoon was seated near him in a wheel chair and he looked eagerly for a bulge on Duke's hip that would denote the whereabouts of a hidden pint. Duke winked and Fay set a box of flowers on Terry's bed.

"To wear in my hair?" asked Terry.

"Open them, stupid," said Duke.

TERRY lifted the lid and saw the neck of a brown bottle nestling among the blooms. He held the box so that Muldoon could see the reason for his sudden smile and blew a kiss to Fay.

"One of the boys got here before you," he said. "He's in the next room playing nurse to the others. I was worried for fear he'd empty the bottle before he reached us. But this takes care of everything."

"You're all hopeless," laughed Fay. "And Dad is as bad as the rest of you. He sent the bottle."

A HUGE concrete truck was backing into the curb when they reached the job. A group of sand hogs were nailing the last braces to support a wooden shoot that extended to the lip of Number Two pit. Others were lifting timbers into place against the surrounding walls or working furiously at the scattered piles of wreckage. It was a scene of seeming confusion, yet each man had a job to do and was doing it skillfully.

Close by the rim of Number Two, Big Swede was conspicuous in his clean white shirt. He was directing the placement of the shoot and as Duke came down the ladder into the excavation, he lifted his hand in signal to the truckman.

A sluggish stream of gray cement flowed along the shoot and dropped into the cylinder. There was a faint echo as it splashed against the bottom

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and Big Swede watched carefully. He tilted the end of the chute slightly, braced it and nodded in satisfaction.

"That be good stuff," he said.

"Starting early to-day, eh, Swede?" said Duke. "Stopped off to see the boys. Matt sends his love and the rest are coming along fine, too."

"Matt be one tough guy, ya."

"He sure is. That burning gas made a mess of him but he'll pull through," said Duke. "I wonder how it started—what made those tanks explode?"

"Me—I dunno for sure. I look up at that roof over the compressor and I see some guy drop something. Maybe a bomb—ya."

"You mean it wasn't an accident?" cried Duke.

"I think maybe someone do that on poipose, ya."

A man in the uniform cap of a private chauffeur crossed the excavation and approached them. He looked about questioningly for a moment as though searching for someone.

"Have you seen Mr. Cotello about?" he asked.

"Is this a joke?" asked Duke savagely. "If it is, you're a bigger fool than you look."

Big Swede turned disinterestedly away. He lifted a long smooth pole and gravely puddled the concrete. The heavy mass was rising quickly as one truck after another spilled their contents into the chute. It was soon flush with the top and the Swede lifted his hand to call a stop. Duke watched him closely and after a few words with the chauffeur stepped beside him.

"This fellow says Cotello drove here this morning and spoke to you," said Duke. "How about it?"

"Ya, he be right," answered Swede and grinned pleasantly at the chauffeur. "But he don't stay long."

"Where did he go?"

"Ho—I think he went to meet some fellows, maybe." Big Swede looked thoughtful. "Ya, that's right."

"I must have missed him when he came up the ladder," said the chauffeur. "Sorry to have troubled you."

He left them and Duke frowned as he watched him cross the excavation. He turned and was about to ask Big Swede a question. His mouth opened—and then closed tightly.

Big Swede bent down and lifted an expensive Panama hat that was lying on the ground near the cylinder rim. He examined it for a moment, gravely. Then he tossed it into the wet concrete. He prodded it lightly with the pole until it sank below the surface of the sluggish gray mass.

"This job be finished quick now, for sure," he said. "No more accidents. Me—I don't like accidents."

He drew the pole slowly across the top of the cylinder, smoothing the concrete—finishing it off.

THE END

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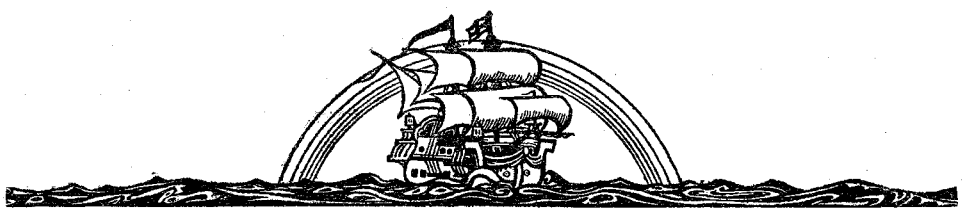

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The Sacred Valley

By MAX BRAND

LEADING UP TO THIS INSTALLMENT

RUSTY SABIN was known among the Cheyenne Indians as "Red Hawk." Born of white parents, Rusty grew up with the Cheyennes and had a deep understanding of his adopted people. On attaining manhood, Rusty became one of the leading warriors of the tribe.

One day while Rusty is buying supplies in the town of Witherell with gold which he has mined from the Sacred Valley of the Cheyennes, he calls at the house of Richard Lester. Charlie Galway who is passing by, notices the gold nuggets, steals them and murders Lester, escaping apparently unseen. Lester's daughter, Maisry, who is in love with Rusty, is prostrated by grief.

The Witherell townspeople, incensed at the murder, accuse Standing Bull of the crime. Standing Bull is a Cheyenne who was with Rusty at the scene of the killing. Rusty pleads for a fair trial, and when he sees that the whites are not treating his friend squarely, he and Standing Bull manage to ride off on Rusty's white stallion. But Standing Bull is severely wounded attempting the escape.

Shortly after Rusty's return to the Cheyenne

Galway saw the blade of a knife flash

Red Hawk, the White Indian, knew that soon he must fight a ruthless battle with the white man who was his deadliest enemy

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encampment, Running Elk, tribal Medicine Man, declares that the Sky People have ordered a sacrifice for Standing Bull's recovery. The Cheyennes, after offering treasure and supplies, make the further sacrifice of putting Rusty in the Valley of Death—which means the end for Rusty. He is taken to the Valley, but Sweet Medicine in the guise of a huge owl leads him to a cave through which he escapes to the Sacred Valley.

The Cheyennes, now suffering from drought, decide that a further offering should be made to Sweet Medicine. So the young, beautiful Blue Bird, who is enamoured with Red Hawk, is led to the Valley of Death. Her father, Lazy Wolf, wails her passing, but can do nothing about it. Red Hawk chances to meet Blue Bird. Overjoyed at seeing each other, they ask Sweet Medicine for an omen giving approval of their desired marriage—but none is given. Blue Bird then leaves to go to her people, and Rusty rolls away the stones of a dam which he has built.

CHAPTER XIV.

THE RETURN OF BLUE BIRD.

WITHDRAWN from the Cheyennes who danced and sang and beat the drums in front of the Sacred Valley, Galway watched the ceremonies with an unceasing interest. He was learning more and more of these people. And the more he learned, the more his heart burned with eagerness to pass through the forbidden gate of the valley.

Through the early morning, as the sun rose, he saw the trader, Lazy Wolf, come on the back of a brown mule. The bowed head and shoulders of the man told of the misery that weighed him down. He sat the mule for a moment, staring at the chanting Indians. Then he came to Galway and dismounted.

"No luck?" asked Galway, with a touch of sympathy.

"I offered the Cheyennes who are guarding the entrance of the Valley of Death, the value of a hundred horses. That's as high as they can count. But that wouldn't shake them. They keep the valley closed. I went to the mouth of it and shouted with all my might. But I never got an answer. I suppose she's dead even by this time."

"I'm sorry for it," said Galway.

"I'll leave the tribe," said the trader. "God knows that life among the whites will be an empty thing for me, but I can't stay among these people and think of murder every time I see their faces."

Here there was a sudden cessation of the chanting, a wild outbreaking of many voices that shouted: "The Blue Bird! Blue Bird!"

Only Running Elk, on his tireless old legs, kept jogging around and around the circle, mumbling the formula of the chant, the prayer for "Rain, rain, rain!"

By his persistence all the efforts that had gone into this great praying would not be broken and wasted. But his eyes rolled wildly in his head and his dancing faltered and almost stopped.

For the Blue Bird, Galway saw, was walking calmly out of the mouth of the Sacred Valley, past the huge columns of the cliffs that guarded the ravine. She came with her head high, smiling a little, and an air of strange dignity made her seem older.

Lazy Wolf, shouting out in a sudden frenzy, rushed towards her.

A dozen strong hands caught and held him fast.

"She has come through the Sacred Valley—purify yourself before you touch her!" they cried to him.

Others were heaping dry sweet grass on the fire so that they could wash themselves in the smoke that rose in a cloud. And the rest, prancing back to keep at a safe distance from this girl who should have been a lifeless ghost, surrounded her with their gestures of wonder.

She paid no attention to Lazy Wolf at first. She stood in the center of the beaten ground where the dancing had been continuing and raised a hand that silenced even the mumbling chant of Running Elk. He sank exhausted to one knee and listened, as the girl said: "I have seen the god. He has heard the prayers of the Cheyennes. He will send you water. Sing to him. Praise him. He will send you water at once!"

The uproar deafened Galway. Every Indian was roaring like a bull. They were dancing, flinging up their arms. And Lazy

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Wolf at last had the girl in his embrace. Galway made his way to them.

He could hardly hear the words of the girl, he was so obsessed in staring at her. For she was transformed. There was a calmness and a removal of interest from the ordinary world of ordinary men. In her dignity there was sadness, also.

A strange little chill of superstition and fear ran quickly through the blood of Galway.

She was saying: "If I speak of what I saw in the Sacred Valley or what appeared to me in the Valley of Death, I should die. I cannot tell you what comes to the souls of brave men and good women when they die. I cannot tell you what happiness comes to them. I can only show you the symbol of Sweet Medicine. I saw him. He drew the life from my body and then breathed it back into my nostrils. He stopped my heart and made it beat again. He bore me into the blue of the Happy Hunting Grounds, and then he returned me to the earth to show the Cheyennes that he loves them, they are his people."

THEY came slowly about her, their hands stretched out. One by one they touched the flare of her skirt or the deerskin shirt, or the hair that flowed down her back. But not one of them dared to touch the little owl feather when she pointed to it.

Some of the dread passed out of Galway when he saw that feather.

He said to the trader, whose eyes were bright with tears of happiness: "Your girl knows how to tell a good yarn while she's about it!"

"People see what they believe in," said Lazy Wolf. "She wouldn't lie. She'd cut her tongue out sooner than lie. And if you suggest to one of these Cheyennes that perhaps she's lying about what's happened to her, you'll have a knife in your throat before you finish talking."

"Why the devil should that be?" asked Galway.

"Because now she's an honor and a glory to the tribe. You see? Every Cheyenne is a bigger and a better man because one of their people went through the Sacred Valley and lived to come among them again."

Galway, narrowing his eyes, listened and nodded.

Then, out of the distance, an obscure roaring noise began, rolled towards them, grew greater, thundered in the very throat of the entrance ravine.

What Galway saw, first of all, was a cloudy white head of spray, like a mist driving on a storm-wind. And afterwards a tumultuous head of water sluiced out into the empty cañon, brimmed it with thunder, sent up waving flags of spray into the morning sunlight.

The Cheyennes fell flat on the ground in the face of the miracle; Galway himself felt his knees shaking. His heart was in his throat, choking him.

He knew the strange stories of the Indian superstitions and of mysterious rain-makers who had brought rain after long drought by incantations. But this was a miracle of another sort. This was a different matter, for by a veritable act of heaven a torrent had been made to spring out in the midst of a dry land!

He was baffled. His brain stubbornly refused to accept the facts which he had seen. He was a gloomy face and figure as he traveled back with the Cheyennes towards their camp.

The whole aspect of creation was changed for them now. Every pool and standing backwater of the ravine was filled with sweet, fresh water. There was ample to drink for their livestock for ten days to come. And since Sweet Medicine had sent them this quick sign of his favor, surely he would not fail to send them the rain also. So they sang and laughed and shouted cheerfully to one another.

Hardly had they reached the Cheyenne encampment before other news came to them. The water-famished buffalo had found the smell of water on the wind and were beginning to troop in thousands to the drinking holes in the bed of the river. Already the hunters were out and bringing

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back skins and horseloads of the meat. It was like one of the great spring huntings, after a starving winter. The back of the famine was broken!

Very greatly the Cheyennes were honoring their god. What had the white men, what had the Pawnee wolves or the Sioux to show in comparison with Sweet Medicine? The encampment was filled with dancing and howling songs; and even the dogs grew excited and ran yelping in noisy crowds.

THE Blue Bird, entering the town, was received as never a woman before had been welcomed. Two famous warriors, on foot, led her horse by the bridle. And the whole population of the tribe flocked around her with raised hands.

The warriors led her horse on slowly since they knew that the people would not be satisfied until every one of them had managed to touch the garments of this new prophetess. And she accepted this homage with a sad and resigned dignity rather than with a girlish joy.

Therefore even the women were not very jealous of her new honors. They muttered to one another: "It is plain that she has seen the god. I won't need to see the owl-feather in her hair. It's enough to see her face. She will never be happy again, poor Blue Bird! She has seen too much of heaven ever to be contented with the earth again."

She asked to be taken to the lodge of Standing Bull and therefore that was her first stopping place.

The fever had left him for the moment; he lay with sunken eyes, a dreadful skeleton. His lips had shrunk against the teeth. He seemed an old man.

He said to the Blue Bird: "They have told me. I know that a good woman can go farther towards the Sky People than the bravest man. But have you a message for me, Blue Bird?"

She sat down on her heels beside him and laid her hand on his forehead.

"Do you feel something come over you from the touch of my hand?" she asked.

"A sort of coolness and a peace," said Standing Bull.

"It is the blessing of Sweet Medicine," said the girl.

"*Ah hai!* It is the word from the god?" breathed the war chief.

"You are to be cured."

Standing Bull closed his eyes and groaned.

"But Sweet Medicine wishes that you should taste no food except what I prepare for you."

"Willingly. But that is not possible. Running Elk gives me every day a new potion. I must take that or he will be angry."

"Let me have the drink," said the girl.

One of the squaws brought a bowl and gave it with a trembling hand to this visitor from the sky. Blue Bird tasted a foul and bitter mixture that made her head sing at once.

"Do you fear Running Elk more than you fear Sweet Medicine?" she asked.

"No, no, no!" muttered Standing Bull.

The Blue Bird flung the contents of the bowl into the fire. The squaws cried out with shrill voices. One of them ran in wild haste out of the lodge. Standing Bull himself gathered his strength to lift himself on one elbow and watch the cloud of steam and smoke and dust of ashes that fountained up into the air as high as the vent-hole of the lodge. Then he let himself fall back with a deep sigh.

"What have you done, Blue Bird?" he demanded. "Running Elk put a great medicine into that bowl of drink. He fasted for three days, and the Underground People told him what to put in it. They told him in a dream."

"I was not told in a dream," said the Blue Bird. "Look, Standing Bull! Here is the sign of the god on my head!"

She touched the owl-feather, and the chief fell silent, staring with wide eyes. The squaw who had not left the tepee, crouching in a corner held a child gathered close to her inside the grasp of each arm; she seemed to be seeing a terrible ghost instead of the pretty face of Blue Bird.

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AND here came a small tumult; then Running Elk strode into the lodge with armed men behind him. He was in a frightful rage. His skinny arm shook as he pointed to the girl.

"Is it true?" he shouted. "Have you spilled out the medicine which I made?"

"Look!" whispered the squaw, still crouched in her corner. "The fire is out. She has put out the fire with the evil of the thing she did!"

The wood in the fire trench was in fact all black; only a single small head of steam and smoke arose from it.

"The fire is sacred!" cried Running Elk, "And you have put it out. The spirits who told me how to make that medicine have stifled the fire with their hands. Those same hands will some night reach for your throat while you sleep and stifle you, also! It will be well for the Cheyennes when that happens!"

"Running Elk," said the Blue Bird, "you have kept Standing Bull very sick for a very long time. While he lies here, you are the head of the tribe. You don't want him to be well. And that is the word of the god to me!"

Running Elk screamed with rage. "You say the thing that is not so!" he cried. "Sweet Medicine would not show his whole face to a woman."

A little murmur of assent came from the braves who had followed the medicine man into the lodge of the chief.

And Running Elk went on: "If your act was right and good in the eyes of Sweet Medicine, he would have made the drink you threw away give the fire more brightness. He would have made it a sign. Instead, he caused it to drown out the fire."

He turned to the men behind him.

"Lay your hands on her and drag her away!" he commanded. "We shall have a council to learn how she should be punished . . . The Underground People are very angry. I can hear their voices inside my ears . . . They are angry at Blue Bird . . . They are plucking at my body with their fingernails . . . Catch hold of her quickly."

Two or three of the warriors stepped forward but the girl faced them quietly and made no effort to escape.

It was Standing Bull who spoke from his bed in a weary voice: "No matter if she has done wrong. Even if the Underground People put their hands over my mouth and choke me today, she is safe in my lodge."

"Standing Bull is sick. His brain has turned into the brain of a child. Will you take her in your hands?"

One of the braves answered: "She has come from the Sacred Valley. How can we touch her unless she permits us to?"

The Blue Bird, looking into the face of the medicine man, shuddered. The constant smile of malice and relaxed old age had turned now into a ghastly rage that worked his features as though with the grasp of a deadly agony.

And then she heard behind her a small cracking or breaking noise. Instantly the squaw of Standing Bull cried out: "A sign! A sign! Look!"

When the Blue Bird turned, she saw the thin column of steam and smoke that rose from the embers of the fire had increased to a thickening white arm and from the wood beneath the smoke came the slight noise of the crackling of fire as it grows hotter and eats into the heart of the fuel.

A groan of surprise came from the throats of the warriors.

STANDING BULL said: "Now we shall see if my brain is that of a child. Now we shall see if the god uses the hands of Blue Bird to do very wise things . . . Flame, lift your head if the Blue Bird comes from Sweet Medicine. Let us see only one red eye of fire, and it will be enough."

The Blue Bird herself, facing the fireplace, dropped on her knees and lifted her hands in prayer, silently. But Running Elk shouted: "There is nothing of the god in this! Sweet Medicine will not let the fire burn. He speaks in my breast. He commands me to stamp out the heat of the wood. . . ."

He strode to the embers, as he spoke,

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and stamped heavily on them with his moccasined foot. Two or three of the warriors groaned, in fear of this almost sacrilegious act. But the wood, which had been broken down and brought into closer contact by the stamp of the foot, now threw up a much greater cloud of smoke, and in the white mist a golden flickering of fire was seen. It flashed like a signalling hand, far away. It put up an arm of red which was withdrawn again; and now with a cheerful crackling the whole of the embers broke into a strong and steady flame that scattered the smoke above it.

Running Elk drew away with halting, backward dragging steps. The warriors said in soft voices, one after another: "We have not put out our hands and touched you. We have not harmed you, Blue Bird."

She said nothing. She was continuing her silent prayer.

CHAPTER XV.

"GOLD! GOLD!"

CHARLIE GALWAY waited three days in the camp. He waited the first day in the hope that he would be able to see something of the Blue Bird. But he discovered that the girl had withdrawn from the society of men and women. She went about the lodge of her father in a faintly smiling silence, cooking and cleaning as she always had done. But Lazy Wolf, even, could not induce her to talk, beyond the speaking of a few words.

It seemed to Galway that either her brain had weakened or she was in the grip of a lasting hysteria. In either case, she was not for him.

Then, on the second and the third day, when he was ready to leave the Cheyenne camp, he was kept there by a continual deluge. The wind shifted into the southwest. All of one night the clouds gathered in increasing piles on the horizon, and the next morning they rolled across the heavens, spilling sheets and torrents of water as they came. There was the smell of the dry earth drinking. The camp turned into a sea of mud. For two whole days and nights without cessation the rain fell; and during all that time he had to listen to the chants of the Cheyennes in praise of Sweet Medicine, who first had answered their prayers by filling the ravine with waters from his Sacred Valley, magic water; and now he had swept up the heaped rain clouds and was giving the water of an entire season in a single downpouring.

But on the third morning the sky cleared. The sun shone. The children ran out to play and their feet made sticky, plopping noises in the mud; the squaws began to take out damp garments and string them up where the sun could dry them. The sides of the lodges were furled up; the entrances were opened; the purifying sun was allowed to strike through everywhere.

On that morning, big Charlie Galway saddled his horses and prepared the packs of the robes and other goods he had obtained from the Indians by trade. Lazy Wolf came to smoke a pipe and watch the work progressing.

He said: "This is a good time for you to be stirring, Charlie. The fact is that the Cheyennes are getting a little restless. Sweet Medicine has been doing so much for them, that the warriors want to do something in return."

"Such as lifting the hair of some white men?" asked Galway, sharply, turning his head over his shoulder.

"Maybe," said Lazy Wolf. "There's a lot of excitement. Running Elk is in a stew because Blue Bird has taken away some of his trade. She won't try to do a miracle every day, like the re-lighting of the fire in the lodge of Standing Bull, but she's performing a pretty thoroughgoing miracle on Standing Bull himself. He's beginning to eat three times a day and the flesh is coming back on his body as fast as the grass comes in the first warm spring days. His squaws go around laughing with joy like drunken women."

"Do you think that Running Elk was poisoning Standing Bull?" demanded Galway.

"I don't think so. I know so. Just

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enough poison to keep him from getting better. Not enough to kill him. Because, the moment he died, another war chief would be chosen, and Running Elk wouldn't be the single head of the tribe."

"If you knew that, why didn't you tell some of the lesser chiefs?"

"Because there's no use trying to talk down a medicine man. If I accused him, he'd do a devil-dance and find out that I was a bad influence in the tribe, and they'd probably skin me alive. But Standing Bull is getting back his strength, and Running Elk is having chills and fevers at the thought of what will happen when the war chief is back on his feet. By this time, Standing Bill knows why he was sick such a long time. And he's saying nothing, but waiting for a chance to get even. That's why we'll all be on the warpath before long."

"I still don't follow it. Civil war, you mean?"

"There's never civil war among the Cheyennes. But Running Elk is sure to try to build up his reputation again, and that means the warpath. He'll get an inspiration, one of these days, and take all the best of the young braves away on a war expedition against the Pawnees, or even against the whites, I suppose. In war days the Indians are a pretty tricky lot. It's better for you to get away and keep away."

"I'm doing that," agreed Galway. "But tell me, man, what makes you stay on here, now that your daughter has gone a little out of her head?"

"She hasn't gone out of her head," said the trader. "She simply feels that she's got something up her sleeve. Like a woman who knows that she's going to have a baby, or something like that. Something that men don't know anything about."

CHARLIE GALWAY told himself that he would head straight back for the town of Witherell with the news that the Cheyennes were about to be up and stirring before long. But he could not help changing the course of his journey until he was close to the entrance of the Sacred Valley. And there he halted, to brood over a number of strange events.

There was some means of communication between the Valley of Death and the Sacred Valley, of course. For he had seen Blue Bird led into the first valley, and later on she had walked calmly out of the second. A god, she said, had carried her from one place to the other. Some agency, but not a god!

As for what actually had happened, no court in the land would believe a word of her testimony; it was a very dizzy business about being carried up to heaven, and all that sort of thing. But, in the end, how had she managed to get from one rock-bound valley into the next?

Other things had happened. Very strange things. The business of the owl-feather, of course, was the purest nonsense. But why had the girl come walking out of the Sacred Valley in that strange trance which still persisted? What had induced her to defy the strength of the great medicine man?

But first, and above all, if Rusty Sabin had mined gold somewhere in this country —if the source of the gold was unknown— if he had been the only man to enter the valley and come out again alive—

Charlie Galway turned with his pack-horses right into the ravine which entered the Sacred Valley.

He rode last, to drive the horses before him. He carried a pair of loaded revolvers in the saddle holsters; he had a rifle balanced in his hands; and his nerves were filled by apprehension to an incredible tensity and accuracy.

So he came with his outfit into sight of the Sacred Valley, and his breath stopped. It had been new-washed by the rain. The big trees rolled like bright clouds above the deep pastures. The river ran with a small song down the center of the valley, and now from the farther end of the valley he could see the white face of the waterfall whose mysterious murmurings and chantings, heard at the mouth of the Sacred Valley, were construed into words and answers by the Cheyennes, when they came to consult the oracle.

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The eye of the trader grew brighter and brighter. This naturally fenced and reserved valley was the sort of a place in which he could settle for the rest of his days.

It was the sort of a place in which he *would* settle. When he took a wife, he would come here.

As for the Cheyennes—well, the matter would have to be settled with them, but sooner or later, at any rate, a war was sure to come which would sweep the red men farther back on the prairies.

AND then he came to a little rabbit run in the grass and in the middle of the small trail was set a trap.

Startled, big Charlie Galway jerked up his head and stared around him.

Was there a god in the Sacred Valley? Well, no god had made that trap but a mere man. He got down and examined the thing. It was well enough done, but he himself could have made a better contraption, he felt. A very average sort of a man had made that trap, in fact. And Charlie Galway was not average. He stretched his arms a little to reassure himself with the sense of the muscles which robed his shoulders with power. Here he was, armed to the teeth, to set himself against a man or men who made silly little rabbit traps instead of shooting such game as they required.

A scattering rush of little hoofs—and a herd of antelope broke out of covert and flashed across the meadows of brown, sun-cured grasses. They did not run far. As he lifted his rifle to shoot he was checked by the multiplicity of the targets. For they stopped only a short distance away and turned towards him, every one of them!

Suddenly Charlie Galway began to laugh. These animals had no fear of man!

Well, he would teach them different ideas. Before long, he would have their hides cured and ready for the market. He would have their meat dried. The simplest thing in the world to build a barrier across the mouth of the valley.

As for the present inhabitant or inhabitants—well, they would have to talk to his rifle! And he knew who would win that argument!

He gave up the thought of shooting game. That could wait until he was ready to eat. No matter where he paused, there would be a full meal of fresh meat waiting, in whatever direction he turned his rifle!

Sacred Valley? It was, in fact, a sort of hunter's paradise.

He came to the lake. It was much smaller, now, than the dimensions to which it had been spread by the dam. Most of the big stones of the dam had been washed and rolled away. There was only a small body of water and on every side of it a muddy stretch streaked and worn by the rush of the water when the dam was broken.

HE could understand now, and perfectly, how the thing happened and how the great rush of water had been loosed into the lower ravine of the river. The moving of a few big stones—and then the pouring of the loosened water would complete the rest of the work and let the whole lake rush off down the ravine.

Charlie Galway, sharpening his eyes, scanned the valley on all sides. But still there was no sign of a dweller. He would have to be on the lookout for the twang of a bowstring and an arrow discharged from one of the many coverts.

Then, to the side, in the midst of the muddy margin of the lake, just beginning to crust over with a dry upper layer, he saw a thin streak of something that flashed—something that flashed with a rich yellow color.

Charlie Galway, instantly, was off his horse and floundering out into the mud. He reached that yellow streak—no it was not the one towards which he had started. Instead, it was a smaller color nearer at hand. And there were others—streaks and little patterns of the same rich yellow.

He scooped up some of the mud. In a rivulet he washed it clear. In the palm of his hand remained a dozen little specks or tiny pebbles of a heavy yellow metal.

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Out of a handful of mud, this much gold, gold, gold!

He wanted to swallow it. The passion of joy made him throw back his head and look towards the sky with an instinctive outswelling of joy, and of gratitude.

But God had nothing to do with this great discovery. It was the work of his own sharp brain and his brave heart that had enabled him to find the way to the source of Rusty Sabin's wealth.

Here—with his single hand—to wash out a week's wages—why, what could a man do with a proper mining pan?

And it was his—all his—as soon as the setter of traps, the keeper of the valley were out of the way.

CHAPTER XVI.

STRANGE DUEL.

THERE had to be a death. Charlie Galway waded out of the mud again and got back to his horses, where the pack animals were tearing at the long grass of the pasture land.

There had to be a death, and that must be the man who had made and set the rabbit trap in the grass. Galway herded his horses loosely together and drove them around the edge of the lake until, on the upper margin of the lake, he was able to see, half-hidden among the trees, the outlines of a house, thatched at the top, built apparently of some sort of bricks.

He could not have been more amazed if he had seen a Greek temple in the midst of a strange wilderness. A house built of *bricks!*

He approached it by making, in the first place, a wide circle. Nothing living responded to him. Nothing showed within or outside the place.

At last, he stalked the house and peered in at a door. What he saw inside was a quite empty interior where there had been placed a few chairs made of withes and willows after the Indian style but according to the white man's idea of convenience.

This startled the observer almost more than the fact that a house of flat bricks had been found at the end of nowhere.

He turned back to stare about him. Still there was no observer anywhere near him. No matter how he squinted into the brush, he could see no shadowy outlines of a lurking form, no glint of a weapon.

At last he went into the house. The packages of dried rabbit's meat, the harvested bushels of oats were such preparations as any Indian might make against winter. The bed of woven willow rods, more supple than any mattress, was of Indian manufacture, also. But this manufacture was cruder, he thought, than he had ever seen coming from the hands of Indian women.

The chairs were undoubtedly meant for a white man's idea of convenience, and what Indian architect since the beginning of time would have designed and partially constructed the big fireplace and chimney?

This was a white man's notion.

But, on the other hand, where was there to be found a white man who would attempt such tasks as these without the slightest evidence of steel tools or weapons?

He examined the boards of the floor. They were half-logs which had been worked, apparently, by fire and dull edges. Steel could not have been used to batter the wood half-smooth, in this fashion. He found in a corner a clumsy fish-spear with a bone trident. He found a stone axe, the head lashed onto the wooden haft by the use of tendons, wound, and rewound.

This he took across his knees, sitting in one of the home-made chairs, and studied at length. It was made of flint, in the head, and the stone was not properly bound to the haft. He had seen more than one stone tomahawk and other stone implements of the Indians, but none had been fastened so clumsily. It was an improvised tool, he would have said.

And yet what man would have made such things?

No Indian, he could swear, would have had the thought, the patience to build such a house. And yet what white man would even have attempted such a task without

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the proper materials at hand? The bricks of the walls, for instance, were misshapen —or, rather, they were shaped as though by hand, and not from any mold.

He was still considering when, it seemed to him, the light inside the room darkened a little.

He sat up straight, considering even this slight alteration of his environment. A moment later, the light was again bright. But it seemed to him that a faint, whispering sound came from behind him. At that, he leaped from his chair and tried to whip up the long, heavy rifle to his shoulder.

As he turned, he saw a man with long, flying red hair that streamed across his shoulders, and a face set for stern effort. Vaguely he realized, in the swirl of the attack, that it was Rusty Sabin who leaped in at him.

But that could not be. Rusty Sabin was dead—

He fired, but as his hand pulled the trigger of the rifle the reaching hand of Rusty knocked the barrel of the rifle up and to the side.

He had missed. And in return he saw the blade of a knife flash before his eyes.

YET it was not the point that struck home. At the last instant, he saw the flashing blade turn. It was the heavy butt that struck him between the eyes and felled him to the door.

He was not completely stunned, but his mind was half-asleep as he felt the other lean over him and take away the revolver which he had belted on his hip. His hunting knife, similarly, was removed. His rifle, which had crashed to the floor, was lifted.

Then a hand was laid on his neck and remained there for a moment.

At last Rusty's voice said: "You are living, Galway. Stand up, therefore!"

Galway rose. He was staggering a little. The room spun before his eyes. He lifted a hand and wiped the blood from his face, for the weight of the blow had split the flesh between his eyes.

Rusty said: "Sit down—there."

Galway took a chair and waited.

The whole thing was growing obvious. Only a man who was neither Indian nor white could have done the things which he had witnessed in the valley—and was not Sabin the white Indian?

"You came here to rob the Sacred Valley," said Sabin.

"I didn't come here to rob," said Galway. "I just came to look around."

"I watched you when you ran into the mud of the lake," answered Sabin. "And when I saw you there, I read your mind. I know that the white men love gold, gold! You steal and murder to gain it. Gold! I knew your heart when I saw you in the lake, washing the gold with your hands."

"Ay," answered Galway. "When I saw that, I was sure that I was the first man in the valley. I didn't dream that there was another man here before me."

"No?" asked Rusty.

"It was only after that that I saw your house, here."

"I watched you all the time," said Rusty. "You moved like a stalking cat. You had your rifle ready, and you were prepared to kill. Is that true?"

"You take a man in a strange country," said Galway, "and he has to look out. A man that's seen gold is going to be pretty light on his feet and pretty sharp in the eye."

Rusty nodded, watching him.

"What am I to do with you?" he asked.

"I'll tell you what I think," said Galway. "We could make a partnership."

"Partnership?"

"What I mean is this. I wouldn't mean to get an equal share. You're here on the ground. You found the gold. You ought to have most of it. But you take and develop a place like this and you need help. You need men and money. You need somebody inside to oversee things. You need an outside agent to keep handling the transportation. There's gotta be somebody to command the trains that haul the loot away. There's gotta be more than one man on the inside of this work. Well, you're the main head of everything. But why shouldn't I be the second one?"

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"THERE'S a good sized fortune in meat and hides standing on foot in this place, and then we could get in some ploughs and horses or mules and check the valley off into fields and start putting it to some use."

"Do you think it is not of some use now?" asked Rusty.

"I dunno what use it is. Do you?"

"It is the garden of a god. It cannot be used by men unless they are his priests," said Rusty, calmly. "Because you have entered the house of Sweet Medicine, you must die."

He handled the revolver which he had taken from Galway. The calmness with which he spoke and the peculiar steadiness of his eye shot horror through the blood of Galway.

"But look here, Sabin," he said, "you're not the fellow to murder a man."

"I won't murder you," said Rusty. "I'll give you a gun to use. There's another revolver in the holster on the saddle of your horse. You can have that."

Galway could draw breath again.

"I'll fight it out with you, then," he said. "I see you're a right sort of man, Sabin. Everybody always has said that you're a right square sort. Why the people in Witherell didn't treat you better that night, I don't know. You seen me talking for you and Standing Bull."

"Did you talk for us?" asked Rusty.

Galway swallowed. The naïve childishness of this man in some ways, and his insight in other matters, made a combination which he could not understand. He continued his lie quickly: "I did what I could. When they started shooting, I knocked up the muzzles of some of the guns. I don't say that I saved your life for you. But I tried to help."

"Ah? Were you a friend to me?" sighed Rusty. "Tell me with an honest heart. Were you a friend?"

"You can see what I did," said Galway. "I'll tell you what. It sort of made me sick to think of a fine big fellow like Standing Bull being strung up for a thing that likely he didn't do. And when you threw in with the Indian, I wanted to help the pair of you."

"I seem to remember," said Rusty, "that you were not altogether a friend, that night. But I may be wrong. If I kill you, Galway, it's not because I really wish to harm you."

"Then what's all the talk about fighting it out with the guns?"

"You have come into the house of the god, and therefore you must die."

"How do you know," said Galway, "that Sweet Medicine doesn't want me in here? Why was I led inside the Sacred Valley if Sweet Medicine didn't want me here?"

"He will make that clear to us when we shoot at one another," said Rusty. "I have done many bad things. It may be that I shall die and that you will serve the god in my place. Perhaps he has brought you here to be his servant."

"You don't put a whale of a lot of trust in him?" asked Galway.

"I trust him as far as I can know him," said Rusty. "But how can a man know the whole will of a god? If I were a good man, my heart should be filled with happiness to live in the house of Sweet Medicine and to see his face every day. But I find myself in pain many times. I grow hungry for my people. The voice of the waterfall is not enough. It may be that my unhappiness displeases the god. Are you ready to take the other gun?"

GALWAY stood up. His head was clear. His eye was bright. However excellent as a shot Rusty might have been in former days, he hardly could be in practice after all this length of time without guns. But with Galway an hour a day of target practice was religiously observed.

He walked out of the doorway ahead of Rusty and went straight to his saddle horse. He pulled the Colt out of the holster, and he could have laughed as he faced Rusty. The fellow was crazy, with his talk about the Indian god. And in the hands of a crazy man the treasures of the Sacred

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Valley could not be left. There was a sort of Fate in this—a Fate which had led him to the Valley so that its resources should be properly exploited. History would not forget the name of Charlie Galway. A rough man, but a fellow who did things worth while.

When he saw Rusty standing at perfect ease, with the Colt hanging loosely down in his hand, a slight pity touched Galway. In that man, he felt, there was a purity of mind such as could not be found in others; but there was the simplicity of a savage, also, and the simple creatures must fall before the more complex brains of civilized man.

"When you're ready, tell me," said Rusty, carelessly.

"What sort of a signal do you want?" asked Galway.

"I don't know. Whatever you please. When that bull bellows again from the buffalo herd, for instance?"

"Ready, then," said Galway.

He stood tense, his weight a little forward on one foot; and Rusty at ease awaited the next booming thunder from the throat of the bull on the farther side of the lake.

It came, a vast, thick, confused note. The two guns leaped in the hands of the fighters. They exploded almost on an instant; or rather the two shots were so close together that they made one detonation.

Something whirred past the ear of Rusty. His own bullet knocked the gun from the hand of Galway and flung the heavy revolver back against his face. Galway, knocked prone on his back, lay senseless.

And Rusty turned straight towards the cave of Sweet Medicine.

"Your hand turned the bullet, oh father," he said. "Your hand struck the blow for me. You are not angry with your servant, then?"

He went to the place where big Charlie Galway lay. The man breathed. Rusty lifted his Colt and took aim between the eyes. And at that moment they opened and looked wildly upwards. The gun sank in the hand of Rusty.

He stretched out an arm towards the cavern in the cliff.

"Give me a sign, father!" he called.

There was no stir at the mouth of the cave. There was only a vaguely ringing echo flung back from the face of the rock.

CHAPTER XVII.

VOICE OF SWEET MEDICINE.

BECAUSE only that hollow, booming echo came back from the cliff, Charlie Galway rode in safety out of the Sacred Valley that day. He had one rifle and one revolver with him. The other guns remained with Rusty. He sat on the White Horse at the mouth of the ravine and called after Galway: "If you should come again, remember Sweet Medicine. The god will strike you down the moment your foot enters the gate of the ravine. Or he may use my hand to destroy you."

Charlie Galway made no answer. The pain of his wounded face blurred his thoughts somewhat, but he already had mapped in his mind the plan of his campaign. In the Sacred Valley there was a half-Indian fanatic who worshipped the god of a barbarous tribe, a fanatic now armed to the teeth and on his guard. The next intruder certainly would die the moment Rusty could put a bullet through him.

But Rusty was a very small barrier compared with the treasure to which he blocked the way. If Charlie Galway could not master the valley by himself, he would find a way in which he could raise up a whole army, if necessary. They would break through into the golden land in spite of all the Cheyennes in the world. He knew, in Witherell, a choice selection of hardy fellows to whom the sight of a handful of gold dust would bring visions of a brighter land than Paradise.

A hundred of those frontier gallants would cut their way to the Sacred Valley and into it and out again with their treasure in spite of the Cheyennes—if all went well.

The mind of Galway did not dwell on

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the fact that this would be a shabby return to a very generous enemy. He was capable of gratitude, but it never could be in him a feeling as strong as the pain from his wounded face. When he thought of Rusty Sabin, he thought of a madman. And madmen don't count in this world of Galways.

And yet there remained in the mind of Galway a powerful picture of that moment when he opened his eyes and saw above him the leveled revolver in the hand of Sabin. Why the bullet had not been fired he could not imagine. And yet he guessed, vaguely, that there was something in the nature of Sabin superior to his own world. Because he guessed this, a sullen anger began to rise in his soul.

It was to increase, rapidly, each time he reflected on the adventure of the Sacred Valley until he began to feel, in the end, a sort of righteous indignation when he recalled how frankly, how almost nobly, he had suggested a partnership to Rusty, a partnership in which Rusty could have retained three-quarters of the spoils.

And, again, it began to seem to Galway that he was performing an act on behalf of all mankind if he scared the dog out of the manger. He was only concerned in securing himself ten shares of the spoils, as captain of the invading army. But ah, if he could have had the looting of the Sacred Valley all to himself! That vision of splendid hope, lost forever, would haunt him to the end of his life.

And in the Sacred Valley, from day to day, Rusty Sabin went on with the building of his house, working constantly at the erection of the massive fireplace which was to crown his labor. He had better tools, now. Before the departure of Galway, he had helped himself to some of the trader's possessions, particularly to a heavy axe the back of whose head made an excellent hammer; he had also some rope, ammunition, a rifle, a revolver, a saddle. He had an adze for the shaping of planks and, above all, he had a saw. The saw was the treasure beyond price.

But though he busied himself constantly, his days were not happy. It was in vain that the valley turned from brown to green. It was in vain that the great night owl, every evening or every morning stooped from the lip of the cave and swept down to take from his hand the sacrifice of the rabbit. Even when he worked himself to a state of exhaustion, he could not sleep well at night.

There remained in his heart a sort of weary sorrow, an emptiness which he could not understand. He told himself that it was an uneasiness based on the manner in which he had allowed Galway to escape from the Valley.

It was true that Galway had sworn never to return, but the oaths of the white men never weighed half so heavily in their minds as a single ounce of yellow gold. And Galway knew that the Sacred Valley possessed a soil rich with the metal. Could it be that he would stay away, or would he return with companions?

SWEET MEDICINE, of course, could protect his own. And yet when Sabin thought of the force of disciplined white fighting men, well-armed, trained, obedient to command, ready to fight to the death, he felt, with a shudder, that even the strength of a god would hardly be enough to defeat them. His own adopted people, the Cheyennes, were brave as brave. A single warrior chosen at random from among the red men, would be almost certain to dispose with ease of a single white man. But with numbers came a mysterious change.

A score of Indians might be baffled by three resolute whites each guarding the back of the other, all patiently determined, fighting on calmly and intelligently even when no hope appeared.

The splendid rush and sweep of the Indian charge was turned back by the rock-like stubbornness of the whites; the keen edge was turned by the hard face of the stone. Ten white men, well in order, even nine novices with one experienced leader, might move guardedly across the plains and

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beat off a hundred selected braves. And therefore if Galway loosed against the Sacred Valley a wave of armed white men, it would need the strength of the god at its full to turn them back. He trusted the god, but feared the future.

In this odd unhappiness of Rusty, in this emptiness of spirit, there was another cause for grief. The memory of the Blue Bird kept walking up and down the Valley at his side. And most of all he remembered her as she had sat on the back of the White Horse on that last morning, between smiling and sorrow.

Maisry Lester occupied his mind every day, also. But the recollection of her was a different matter. It was something more important, more beautiful, but almost as removed from actuality as are the ghosts of the dead.

His people had cast him out and he never could see her again. But with the Cheyennes it was different, and many a day, when he rode the White Horse down the valley at high noon, he would hear the chant of a prayer come echoing up the hollows of the ravine.

They were not answered by the waterfall's echoes alone, now. Sometimes he put his face close to the hollows of the rocky face of the cliff and called out words in a melancholy, straining voice, words which could be put together to make one of several meanings. It was not that he wanted to be mysterious, but when he listened to the prayers, he usually felt some immediate emotion which, he felt, was communicated directly to him from the god.

So, when he heard a young lad crying out at the mouth of the ravine, he listened and made out, clearly, the words of the appeal.

"Sweet Medicine, shall I be strong for the torment of the initiation? Shall I be able to drag the big buffalo head tied to the flesh of my raw shoulders with the thongs? Shall I scream out like a woman or shall I be strong and silent like a man? Sweet Medicine, tell me if I shall be ashamed. Be merciful!"

AND Red Hawk, remembering the shame of that initiation which he had not been able to face, answered: "The known face is not terrible. The day is a friend; the night is the terror. To the boy, manhood is a mystery. To the man, boyhood is sleep and happy dreams remembered. But to Sweet Medicine the young and the old are of one age. If you take the step into manhood, you take the step with pain. All the pain you have known will help you."

And again on a day he heard a chanting of many men and then the hoarse, familiar voice of Running Elk, saying: "Sweet Medicine, you have sent water to us out of your own hand. You have given rain to make the world green once more. Now we are going to show that we are your children and love you. We are going to get scalps and sacrifice them to you. Not the scalps of the Sioux or the Pawnees. We are going to bring you better scalps. We are going to bring you the scalps of white men and long-haired scalps of white women and the soft hair of children. Give us a token."

Then he answered: "The horses are weary. The warriors search the edge of the sky with searching eyes. The smoke of the white man rises. Happy is the brave who returns to the town of the Cheyennes. Happy is the warrior whose skin is not beaten by the rain until it rots like old grass."

He was very troubled. It had seemed to him, as he spoke, that perhaps on this occasion he was speaking a little more for himself, a little less for Sweet Medicine, in trying to avoid the war between white men and Indians.

He remained in the Sacred Valley until sunset, every moment more and more disturbed. And at last he saddled the White Horse and took rifle and revolver with him. He felt that he was being drawn forward by a force like that of a great wind, an irresistible impulse. And so he rode straight out of the valley, past the towering rock pillars of the gate.

TO BE CONTINUED NEXT WEEK

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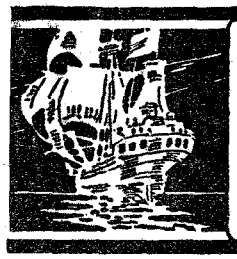

Argonotes.

The Readers' Viewpoint

TRUE to life, believes

AL LIEVERS:

I have just finished reading what I consider to be the best story printed in ARGOSY this year, and take it from me, the guy that wrote it sure knows his stuff. I refer to "Soldiers of Misfortune," by J. D. Newsom, in the June 1st issue.

My reasons:

1. It may be fiction, but truth may be stranger.
2. There are no unnecessary heroics.
3. It is possible, for I have seen it in real life.

Having put in over three years in France and Belgium with the Canadian forces during the late squabble, most of the time as a sergeant, this story brings back memories of more than one such gink as *Norton* (minus the use of French), and also of another *Cordelier*.

One of our *Nortons* was the bane of every N. C. O. and officer of the battalion when we were out of the line, but—I could trust this bird anywhere when we were in the line, "raiding party," "sacrifice post," "fighting patrol," "firing step" he took them all as they came and looked for more; he was worth a platoon of "parade soldiers" and more than once I succeeded in springing him from the guard-room by mentioning his front line behavior to the O. C.

Unlike *Norton* of the story, however, he managed to get in the way of a lot of loose shrapnel, and now he saves money on shoes, having only to buy one at a time.

Our *Cordelier* (lieutenant) got his before he could do as much damage as the one in the Legion, but he sure caused plenty of "ground molars" while he lasted. His casualty report stated: "German machine gun bullet" R. I. P., but—well, we'll leave it at that.

Wayne, Alberta, Canada.

Looking Ahead!

MUNUMGURU

Can an African witch doctor put a curse upon an intelligent white man?—Find the answer in a long novelette by that ARGOSY favorite,

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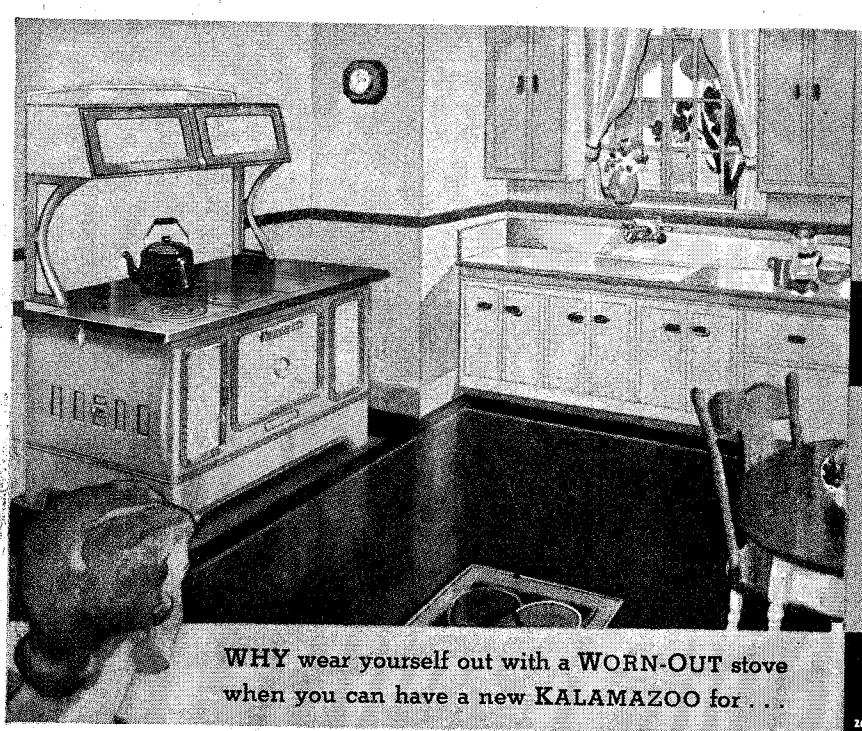

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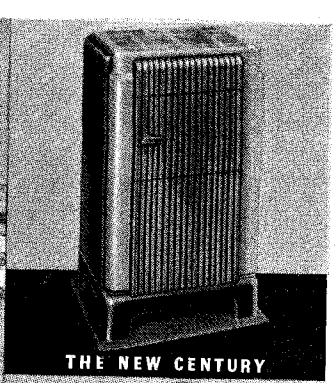

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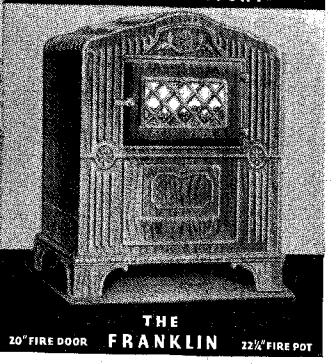

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